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HIS HIGHNESS  
THE MAHARAJA OF  
BIKANER

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INDIAN STATES AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

FEDERAL INDIA (*jointly with* SIR KAILAS HAKSAR)

THE NEW EMPIRE

CASTE AND DEMOCRACY

THE PORTUGUESE IN MALABAR

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THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS  
THE STATES

GULAG SINGH—A BIOGRAPHY





H.H. The Maharaja on his visit to London for the Coronation of  
H.M. King George VI, May 1937

# HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJA OF BIKANER

A BIOGRAPHY

*By*

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*With an Introduction by*  
LORD HARDINGE OF PENSHURST

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## INTRODUCTION

SINCE the Golden Jubilee of His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner will be celebrated in the autumn, it has been felt by many of his friends that the time has come for the publication of a biography of His Highness, giving a full account of his many activities, and of his very successful government and administration of the State of Bikaner, to which he succeeded on the death of his elder brother.

I am in a position to give only a short appreciation of what I knew of the Maharaja and his State from the time when I arrived in India in 1910 until I left India in 1916, and again on my return to India for a few weeks in the winter of 1930-1, when I had the pleasure of revisiting Bikaner, though unfortunately his Highness was absent in Europe during my visit.

The Maharajas of Bikaner and Gwalior were my two first guests in Government House, Calcutta, in 1910, and they proved two of my most loyal and trusted friends until I left India in 1916. Both of these friends were of the very highest character in every way and were models of what Indian Princes are and should be.

During the few short years of my administration in India I was able to testify to the extraordinary progress achieved in Bikaner, a desert State with many natural disadvantages, but which, nevertheless, has made more material progress and achieved greater prosperity than many other States in India blessed with greater advantages by climate and nature. In former years, famine was recurrent owing to the lack of irrigation. Now the irrigation of 620,000 acres has been completed, for which the negotiations were in progress during the period of my viceroyalty.

When His Highness first assumed full powers, there



was only one railway line of 8½ miles in the State; now there are no less than 800 miles of railways.

As for education, no Indian State can boast of a wider dissemination of both primary and secondary education for both boys and girls, and I can remember going to a school of boys of ten to twelve years old in Bikaner city and putting to them the most complicated arithmetical problems, involving simple and compound interest, which, to my surprise, they solved quite correctly by mental arithmetic.

It was during my stay in India that the Maharaja, when paying me a visit, announced his intention of creating a Legislative Assembly in his State. I welcomed and encouraged the idea, and the Assembly was inaugurated in 1913. There was no public demand for such an institution, but it has worked well, and there is a non-official majority in the Assembly—there are now municipal corporations in the principal towns, a district board for the rural areas, and panchayats in the villages.

Another institution in which His Highness took great interest and has played an important part is the Chamber of Princes, which was a development of the Conferences of Princes initiated in 1914 for the discussion of matters affecting themselves and their States. The Chamber of Princes has now become an important wheel in the machinery of government.

The city of Bikaner, with its old Fort, its beautiful palace, fine public buildings, and public parks, is a capital of which any Ruling Prince may well be proud.

My own personal relations with the Maharaja were those of great mutual friendship and esteem, cemented by a frequent interchange of visits, and I enjoy very happy reminiscences of His Highness's most generous hospitality at Bikaner, Gajner, and elsewhere, and of really unforgettable days of sport with His Highness, pigsticking and shooting sand-grouse, black buck, chinkara, houbara, and

other game. His Highness is a marvellous sportsman and a first-rate shot with gun and rifle. These were wonderful days, and I am sure that one of the best and surest ways for a Viceroy or Governor to learn and know the country he governs is to associate with the Ruling Princes, and to acquire through them an insight into the mentality of the people and their views on important political problems affecting the States and British India.

I cherish the friendship of His Highness the Maharaja, and I trust that he may long be spared for the good of his State and to the advantage of India.

HARDINGE OF PENSHURST

26 *June* 1937.



## PREFACE

**T**HIS Biography is in no sense an official publication. As His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner completed on the 17th of September, 1937, the fiftieth year of his reign as the Ruler of one of the premier States in India, it was suggested to me by some of his friends that an account of his life and activities would be a most opportune undertaking. I had myself suggested to the Maharaja more than four years ago that I should be permitted to write his Life as I felt that the achievements of the Maharaja, both in his State and in the wider fields of Indian and Imperial politics, constituted an important chapter of modern Indian history.

Neither the Maharaja, nor his Government is, therefore, in any way associated with this work. At my request the Government of Bikaner placed at my disposal the official publications of the State and supplied me information on points which I considered necessary to refer to them. For this assistance I am grateful to them, especially to Maharaj Mandhata Singhji, the Home Minister, who was assiduous in hunting out old records and making them available to me. No responsibility, however, attaches to him or to any officer of His Highness's Government for any statement contained in this book or for any opinions which are expressed by me.

I make grateful acknowledgement of my obligation to His Highness the Maharaja Dhiraj of Patiala for permission to undertake the work, to the Right Honourable Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, K.G., for his valuable Introduction, to Sir Walter Lawrence, G.C.V.O., G.C.I.E., for the 'Appreciation' which he has kindly contributed and which appears as a separate chapter in the book, to Sir Brian Egerton, K.C.I.E., formerly tutor to the Maharaja

of Bikaner, for his interesting note on the Maharaja's education and training, and to Sir Frank Brown, C.I.E., for advice on many matters relating to the publication of the book.

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# GLOSSARY OF ANGLO-INDIAN WORDS OCCURRING IN THE BOOK

Arz karo	To petition.
Durbar	Court—also Government of an Indian State.
Izzat	Dignity, prestige.
Jagir	Fief.
Kharita	A formal letter exchanged between Rulers (also with the Viceroy).
Mandi	Market town.
Mansab	Army rank under the Great Moghuls.
Naubat Khana	Place in front of the palace where the drum is beaten as an emblem of royalty.
Panchayat	A board of five which settles the affairs of the village or of small communities.
Ryot	Cultivator.
Sanad	A formal document granting or confirming some privilege, honour, or right.
Seth	A member of the merchant class.
Shikar	Shoot: big game hunt.
Simhasan	The lion-seat—the throne.
Sirdar	Noble.
Tehsil	A unit of revenue administration.
Thakur	A Rajput noble.
Thikana	Estate.
Tilak	A mark (usually red) placed on the forehead.
Zamindar	Landowner.



## *Chapter One*

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

AMONG the many clans of Rajputs, whose patriotism, valour, and chivalry illumine Indian history, none stand higher in fame or in the glamour of their historic tradition than the Rathores. Descended from the Solar line of the epics, the Rathores or the Rastrakutas came first to be known in Indian history as the great imperial dynasty in the Deccan. In the first decade of the eighth century the Rastrakutas wrested from the Western Chalukyas territory roughly corresponding to the Bombay Presidency, and established their capital at Malkhed. We know from their inscriptions that Dantidurga Khadgavaloka, who assumed imperial titles and dignity, was reigning in A.D. 753. One of his descendants, Dhruva I, conquered as far north as Ujjain in Malwa. Arab and Persian travellers who visited their capital at the time speak of the monarchs of that dynasty as 'the Emperors of India' and as being among the great monarchs of the time. By the tenth century we see the Rastrakutas again established as the leading power in northern India with their capital at Kanauj. The rivalry between Jai Chand of Kanauj, who claimed imperial sway over Aryavarta, and the impetuous Prithviraj Chohan, and the calamitous results of their quarrel constitute a turning-point of Indian history. The invasion of Mahommed of Ghor and the disasters that overtook the Rajput arms in the Punjab and the Gangetic Valley completed the ruin of the Empire of Kanauj.

But from the ruins the Rathores rose again. One branch of the family, with the image of the family deity and the emblems of imperial power, wandered with a few retainers into the desert lands of Rajputana. There they

established the kingdom of Marwar in the fourteenth century. Under Rao Jodhaji, who founded the city of Jodhpur, the new kingdom attained a position of eminence. A warrior of great renown, he conquered the neighbouring Mohils and Jats and established, in spite of great natural difficulties, dominion over a very wide area.

Rao Bikaji, the founder of the Bikaner State, was his son. Discontented with his prospects, as he had then an elder brother living, and spurred by his ambitions, Bikaji with a few hundred men set out to conquer new lands.

The circumstances under which this expedition came to be undertaken are in themselves interesting, and are described in detail in the old chronicles of the State.

Bikaji, it would seem, was one day sitting in the durbar of his father carrying on a conversation with his uncle Kandhalji. Rao Jodhaji, who watched the uncle and the nephew engaged in this manner, chaffed them and remarked half in jest that their conversation must be in regard to some scheme of war and conquest. Kandhalji, who was a prince of spirit, was touched to the quick and announced in durbar that the Rao's wish was a command to him and that Bikaji and he would not rest till they had conquered new territories. Perhaps they had already some scheme under contemplation. In any case there was present with them at the durbar Napo, a Sankhala Rajput, whose people, weakened by war, had abandoned the country lying to the north of Jodhpur. He suggested its occupation. Rao Jodhaji not only approved of the suggestion but encouraged Bikaji in his ambitious project, perhaps because he realized the difficulties which he would have in providing for his large family. A small expedition was immediately organized. In 1465 Bikaji left Jodhpur at the head of a force consisting of 100 horse and 500 foot. He was accompanied by his uncle Kandhalji and a few adventurous chiefs. The party also included,

besides the military chiefs, the nucleus of a civil administration. The essential civil officials, such as accountants, secretaries, and revenue officers, were, as a result of Bikaji's foresight, taken along with the military expedition.

The area nearest to Jodhpur to which they first marched was but a barren desert. Its previous occupants had abandoned it. Bikaji therefore occupied it without a fight. This, however, was only a base. To the north of it lay a powerful Bhati kingdom. In the east the Jats, then as now a most warlike clan, were in occupation. The important town of Hissar was the head-quarters of the Governor of the Delhi Sultan, and the area surrounding it was an integral part of the Pathan kingdom. Scattered everywhere were small chieftainships, weak for offensive warfare, but well entrenched in their desert fastness to withstand the attacks of outsiders.

Bikaji's first halt was at Mandaur. There at the shrine of the local deity he dedicated himself to the great work he had undertaken. Bikaner chronicles state that divine assistance was vouchsafed to him by the miraculous presence of Śiva's *mir'āt* (amulet) in the morning in his wardrobe. The party moved on, with the happy feeling of assured success through divine help, and reached Deshnok, a village sixteen miles to the south of the present town of Bikaner. In that village lived a famous *charan* woman, Sri Karniji, who was considered a semi-divine personality. She was influential with the neighbouring Rajas as a holy woman, especially with Sekho, the Bhati Rao of Pugal, who had been blessed by her and declared to be her spiritual brother. Bikaji paid his respects to the saint and she announced to him in the presence of his companions 'your destiny is higher than your father's and many servants will touch your feet'. At her direction Bikaji established himself at Chaundasar.

The small area which had come under Bikaji's occupation

was slowly built up into a State. A fort was erected at Kodamdesar and the image of Bhairunji was set up in a temple which still exists. The deserted tract of Janglu was repopulated and became again a flourishing area. The small army which started on the original expedition also grew in size. Naturally Bikaji, who had left his home to carve out a kingdom, was not content with the small slice of desert that he had occupied. But he knew that with the forces at his disposal he could not successfully attack and conquer the territory under the effective control of warlike tribes. It was to Karniji that he went for advice. She suggested that Bikaji should ally himself by marriage with the daughter of the Rao of Pugal, her spiritual brother, a man of influence and power in the Bhati country lying to the north of the area that Bikaji had occupied. The wisdom of the suggestion was recognized by Bikaji who readily consented to the proposal. But even at the suggestion of Karniji, Sekho would not agree to give his daughter to the new-comer. Circumstances, however, helped Bikaji. Soon after his refusal Sekho was captured by the Mohammedan Governor of Multan in a raid, and Karniji, who was approached for help, received the promise of the Bhati princess's hand for Bikaji in return for the latter's helping to release her father.

The alliance gave a foothold to Bikaji in Bhati territory. He established a stronghold in their country and the Bhaties soon awoke to the danger which this extension of Bikaji's power involved. Under the leadership of Kolkaran Kehrot, a renowned chief, they mustered strong and a fierce battle took place in which Bikaji's arms proved victorious. Though successful in the fight Bikaji and his counsellors realized that a fort in the midst of a hostile population was not safe as a capital and decided to move to a more suitable site. Omens decided the choice.

In April 1486 Bikaji laid the foundations of the fort which was destined to become the home of his descen-

dants. Three years later, the construction of the city, called after its founder Bikaner (the City of Bika), was undertaken. Whatever the omens that determined the site, they must undoubtedly have been auspicious, for the fort and town that Bikaji founded have endured for centuries as the flourishing capital of his illustrious successors.

With the establishment of a permanent capital it became clear to the neighbouring tribes that a new State had come into existence. Some of them voluntarily acknowledged the sovereignty of Bikaji, especially the Godara tribe of Jats whose chiefs still enjoy the privilege of placing the royal *tilak* on the forehead of the Bikaner rulers at the time of their coronation. The submission of the Godaras brought Bikaji into conflict with the Sarans, another tribe of the same race, who were constantly at war with them. The Godaras having secured the protection of Bikaji, the Sarans approached the powerful Rajput Chief of Sawani to help them. The fight soon came to be between the two Rajput chiefs, and Bikaji was able to kill his opponent in open combat. Slowly in this way the power of Bikaji extended till the boundary of his dominions touched the Mohil country on the Jaipur side and Hissar on the north-east.

The country of the Mohils had been conquered by Jodhaji, who had put it under the charge of Bidaji, a younger brother of Bikaji. But troubles of an unexpected character soon made it necessary for Bidaji to approach his brother. The expropriated sons of the Mohil Chief had found favour with the Sultan at Delhi, who instructed his governor at Hissar to help them to recover their patrimony. Alone and unaided, Bidaji was helpless against the imperial forces commanded by Sarang Khan himself. Bidaji, who had offended his father, took refuge with his brother, who immediately raised an army of eight thousand men and marched



against the enemy. The imperial forces were driven out of the Mohil country. Sarang Khan, the Governor, after a personal discomfiture at the hands of Kandhalji, retired in haste to his head-quarters. The lands were restored to Bidaji, but he held them as a feudatory of his brother.

Though the Mohil country was thus conquered and annexed, Bikaji had thereby earned the enmity of a formidable opponent. Sarang Khan was determined to wipe out the disgrace of the defeat he suffered at the hands of Kandhalji. The Governor collected a large force and attacked the Rathore Chief who was stationed at a point near his territory. Kandhalji, taken by surprise, fought gallantly but fell in the action. The loss of his uncle was greatly mourned by Bikaji. He had in a sense been the father of the original expedition. It was to him that Bikaji was accustomed to turn for advice at all times of crisis. Bikaji, on hearing the news, took a solemn oath that he would not eat bread till he had avenged the death of one who had been like a second father to him. But to move single-handed against the Imperial forces would have been the utmost rashness. He sought and received the help of his father, Rao Jodhaji, who at the head of a large force joined his son. The combined Rathore armies met the Imperial troops at the village of Kans. In the action that ensued Sarang Khan was killed and the Imperial army was put to flight.

Rao Jodhaji, who was growing old, was anxious to settle the affairs of his family before his death. Bikaji had already won a kingdom for himself. The Rao therefore asked him to remain content with what he had won and not to claim the succession to his father's State. The elder son having died Bikaji had become heir to the throne, but having carved out a kingdom for himself he was content to leave his patrimony to his brothers. But he made one condition. As the eldest living son, the heirlooms and the insignia of royalty brought from

Kanauj belonged as of right to him. Kingdoms he might conquer but these cherished emblems of imperial sway which should go to the eldest line, he could not legitimately give up. Jodhaji saw the reasonableness of this claim and agreed that they should, after his own death, be sent to Bikaner.

In A.D. 1491 Rao Jodhaji died. While Bikaji on his part desisted from putting forward the claim to the Jodhpur throne, Rao Sujoji, who had succeeded Jodhaji, in spite of all explanations would not give up the heirlooms. There was no option for Bikaji but to take them by force. He collected a large army and invaded Jodhpur. The Jodhpur army was defeated and the city itself was given up to plunder. Sujoji took refuge within the fort which the Bikaner army surrounded and besieged. At this stage Sujoji's mother intervened and asked for a conference. She herself came to see Bikaji and at her request he agreed to raise the siege and return to his capital if the heirlooms were given over to him. These, consisting of the throne, the State umbrella, and other royal emblems, and the image of the family goddess, were handed over to Bikaji who brought them in triumph to his capital where they still remain.

The area which Rao Bikaji conquered and formed into a kingdom had, indeed, few attractions. Situated in the middle of the Indian desert, where the landscape is unrelieved either by trees or by ploughed fields, where nothing but low sand-dunes meet the eye for miles with forbidding barrenness, and the scorching sun makes human or even animal life a daily struggle against nature, few could have prophesied for the kingdom of Bikaner, at its foundation, the prosperity and greatness which the future held in store. Endless distances, vast stretches of unrelieved sand, deceptive mirages which created a sense of human helplessness—these were the physical characteristics of the country which Bikaji conquered for himself

and his successors. Its barrenness did not make him despair; he knew the hardy quality of his men: he knew that the character of men was sharpened in the fight with nature and the unceasing struggle for life. In the middle of the desert he built his capital city—a standing challenge to the elements and a monument to the hardihood of his race.

The rulers of Bikaner are directly descended from Bikaji and thus represent the elder branch of the Rathore dynasty. In the course of its five hundred years of separate and independent existence, the dynasty of Bikaner has been remarkable in many ways. As great and progressive rulers of their own State, as generals and statesmen of the Moghul Empire, as staunch allies and friends of the British Crown, they have achieved a distinction which is surpassed by none and equalled by few in Indian history.

Founded by enterprise and courage, the Bikaner dynasty maintained itself in its desert kingdom only by successive campaigns. Rao Bikaji's descendants had constantly to fight their own kinsmen of Jodhpur, and the other surrounding states who did not easily reconcile themselves to the rise of a new power. But though often put to difficulties the descendants of Bikaji held their ground, now allying with one, now with the other, but never yielding an inch of territory.

It was with the growth of the Moghul Empire under Akbar that Bikaner outstripped its rivals and became one of the leading States of Rajputana. Early in the reign of Akbar, Rao Kalyan Singhji laid the foundation of that policy of friendship and co-operation between the emperors and the rulers of Bikaner which stood both in good stead for over two centuries. Rao Kalyan Singhji's friendship was valued by the Emperor, and the ruler of Bikaner soon attained a position at the Imperial Court which helped him to consolidate his own dominions and establish his sway firmly over the rebellious tribes within the frontiers

of his State. Kalyan Singhji's son Rai Singhji carried on this tradition and attained even higher favour. He stood next after the Raja of Amber among the Hindu rulers at the Moghul Court, and enjoyed a *mansab* of 5,000, which was the highest dignity to which those who were not members of the Imperial family were admitted. Rai Singhji was in fact one of Akbar's most trusted generals, and he fought with distinction in all the Emperor's campaigns. In the expedition against Ahmedabad, Rai Singhji, who held high command under Akbar, distinguished himself in the assault on the city and slew in single combat the Governor, Mirza Mahommed Hussein. He maintained his influence and authority both in the time of Akbar and his son, Jehangir; and in the troubles relating to the succession of the latter, Jehangir himself acknowledged that he depended greatly on Rai Singhji, 'one of the most considerable of Rajput Amirs'. The Emperor's confidence in him was such that the Raja was placed in charge of the capital and the fort. It was Rai Singhji who built the present fort of Bikaner and laid the foundations of the palaces which are among the most beautiful gems of Indian architecture. Rai Singhji's brother Prithwi Rajji, known as Peethal, was one of the most renowned poets and scholars of his time. He was equally at home in the field of battle and at the council table. Akbar particularly enjoyed his company and when Peethal died composed the following couplet:

Pīthāl soñ majlis gaī, Tān Sen soñ rāg;  
Hañsibo rāmibo bolibo, gayo Birbal sāth.

As a poet he is still held in high honour. His great epic poem in Dingal, *Veli-Krishna Rukmani ri*, is undoubtedly the masterpiece of Rajasthani literature. The esteem with which Indian scholars received that work in the lifetime of the poet may be judged from the fact that it was translated into Sanskrit. Nor has its fame

diminished with time. Both the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Hindustani Academy of Allahabad have published critical and annotated editions of the book in recent times. But perhaps the incident for which Prithwi Rajji is best remembered in Indian history is his stirring letter to Rana Pratap, the unconquered hero of Hinduism, about whose reported submission Akbar had boasted in durbar. Prithwi Rajji openly declared that for the Emperor's Crown the Rana would not make his submission and wrote a stirring poem to Pratap asking to be informed whether the sun had risen in the west for Pratap to call Akbar Padshah and whether he, Prithwi Rajji, should for ever hang down his head in shame or commit suicide. As Tod remarks :

'the effusion of the Rathore was equal to ten thousand men; it nerved the drooping mind of Pratap and aroused him to action and the Rana replied with equally stirring verses that as long as there was life in him he would call Akbar by no other name than Turk.'

Among Rai Singhji's successors, Maharaja Anup Singhji, the first to be invested with that title, was perhaps the most remarkable. Powlett justly describes him as having revived 'the golden time of Bikaner valour and fame'. A great patron of art, music, and learning, the Maharaja was himself a versatile genius; a distinguished scholar in Sanskrit, a mathematician, and an astronomer. The manuscript library he collected and left, which is now housed in the fort of Bikaner, contains some very rare and valuable books and is considered one of the best Indian libraries now in existence. In the field of battle also Maharaja Anup Singhji's achievements were unique. He captured for Aurangzib the fort of Bijapur, and was in command of Moghul armies in the attack on Golconda. In fact he was one of the great leaders in the Deccan campaign of Aurangzib, and one of the Emperor's most trusted generals.

Successive Rulers of Bikaner gave unstinted service to the Moghul Empire. There was no important campaign in Hindustan or in the Deccan in which the rulers of Bikaner did not, at the head of their own armies, fight side by side with the emperor. They shed their blood freely, so much so that even Tod, who was not well acquainted with the history of Bikaner, admits that the Bikaner family furnished an example 'of the prodigal sacrifice of Rajput blood in imperial service'. In fact their record of military service was unequalled in India. Every one of the sixteen rulers who reigned during the Moghul period and lived to the age of maturity personally saw active service in the cause of the Empire. During a period of 164 years, covering in fact the total length of effective Moghul dominion in India, every single ruler of Bikaner, either at the head of his own troops or in command of the imperial armies, fought in the wars of the Deccan. Nor was this service confined to the rulers themselves. The princes and cadets of the family achieved equal glory and shed their blood with equal prodigality in the cause of the Empire. Their service to the Moghuls was not confined to military operations. In responsible posts as viceroys and governors and as imperial representatives in difficult diplomatic negotiations, the rulers of Bikaner and the cadets of their house achieved distinction for themselves and glory for the Empire. During a period of a hundred years they held no less than seventeen viceroyalties or governorships. Such was the confidence in the statesmanship and administrative ability which the emperors placed in them that they were generally selected for the governorships or viceroyalties of the most troublesome or the most recently conquered areas of the Empire. Apart from the rulers themselves, the younger sons of the house like Pirthwi Rajji and Padam Singhji were held in high honour at the imperial court.

The exceptional dignity which the rulers of Bikaner

enjoyed at the Moghul Court is attested by the numerous firmans addressed to them by the Emperors. There was no honour which the Emperors did not bestow on them. Hereditary titles of Maharaja, Maharajadhiraj, Raj Arajeshwar, were conferred on them by different Emperors. The great dignity of Mahi-Maratib, given only to the most important territorial rulers, was bestowed on them on three different occasions. The early Moghul emperors were very strict in conferring such dignities on the rulers subordinate to them, and it is a proof of the very special favour in which the rulers of Bikaner stood at the imperial court that they received from successive emperors these distinguished marks of honour.

It should not, however, be thought that, loyal as the rulers of Bikaner were, they were at any time servile tools of Moghul policy, who for their own advancement were prepared to suffer the humiliation of their people. Whenever their dignity was wounded or their own rights encroached upon they were ready to resist even imperial authority. The most celebrated instance of this is the occasion from which Bikaner rulers derive their proud motto: 'Jai Jangal Dhar Badshah'. The story, which is given in all Rajput histories, is thus narrated by Powlett :

'An incident occurred in Raja Karan Singh's time which is well known throughout Rajputana, and has been much the subject of poem and song. The Kiyant relates that Aurangzeb contemplated the conversion to Islamism of the Rajput chiefs. It tells how the emperor destroyed the gods of Benares,—how the Deo Bashesha, refusing to be destroyed, jumped into a well, leaving the site of his temple to be converted into that of the present striking mosque of the city; how the temples of Brindaban and other places were likewise levelled; how Amer gave refuge to one god, the famous Kesava, which was subsequently transferred to Mewar, where the Rana generously devoted the heads of a lakh of Sesodias for his defence, and how after all this the Rajas joined the imperial army ostensibly

for a campaign beyond the Indus. By the time the army had reached Attuk, Raja Karan Singh discovered, with the assistance of a friendly Saiyad in his service, that the emperor intended to convert all the Hindus by force after they had crossed the Indus. The Rajas took counsel regarding the course to be pursued, and it was agreed to act so as to cause the Musalmans to insist on their right of precedence in crossing the river, which the Hindus would thus be enabled to place between themselves and their enemies. Accordingly the Rajas sent their 'harkaras' (messengers) to take possession of the thousands of boats collected for the passage of the army. As had been foreseen the Musalmans resented this movement as an impertinence, and the Hindu harkaras were driven away, the Musalmans declaring they would use the boats first. Just as the latter, containing the Muhammadan portion of the host, had crossed the river, news arrived of the death of the Raja of Amer's mother, and on this pretext all the Rajas delayed their crossing for twelve days, during which the next step they were to take was anxiously discussed. It was evident to them that if they left the means of instantly recrossing the river in the hands of the emperor, they would, if they turned their faces homewards, be immediately attacked in their rear by the superior Musulman force, and that at least they would not escape without severe loss. At length the Rajas came in a body to Karan Singh, and pointed out to him that since his territories were the least susceptible of invasion, he could, with comparatively little danger to himself, save their religion, and bear the brunt of the imperial displeasure by beginning the destruction of the boats. Karan Singh assented, but not without a condition. Seated on his "gadi" he was for once to receive the homage of the assembled Rajas as Emperor of Hindustan (or, as another account says, as the Jungle<sup>1</sup> Emperor), and to this the Rajput chiefs agreed. The Bikaneries then set to work to destroy the boats in the presence of the "ahadi" or imperial messenger attached to the darbar. The guilt of leading the league being thus laid upon the shoulders of Karan Singh, the other Rajas struck in, all the boats were soon useless, and the Rajputs set

<sup>1</sup> 'Jungles' was one of the titles of the Chohan Kings of Delhi (Tod, vol. ii, p. 421, 2nd ed.).



off securely on their way home. Karan Singh did not fail to reward the Saiyad through whose timely warning the threatened calamity was averted. He received a grant of a pakka pice on every house in Bikaner and village Pankhawala rent free. It may be here mentioned that for many generations there have been a class of Saiyads employed in the Bikaner forces who have furnished many faithful soldiers to the darbar.'

The decay of Moghul power naturally reflected on the greatness of the Bikaner house. In the shadow of imperial power the dynasty had grown to greatness and had eclipsed the other Rajput States. The anarchy that followed the break-down of Moghul power witnessed a slow decline in the prosperity and power of Bikaner. But its geographical position and the valour and wisdom of its rulers saved Bikaner from the humiliations and indignities to which the other great States of Rajputana were subjected as a result of Maratha aggression. Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur had all to bend to the Maratha. Their courage and chivalry were broken by successive defeats at the hands of Scindia's disciplined troops, and they were forced even to pay tribute to the marauding generals. But Bikaner was never conquered and paid neither *chauth* nor tribute to the invader. In its sandy expanse it maintained its proud independence; extending its territories by capture of strategic points, and putting down refractory nobles and waging an intermittent war with Jodhpur.

A word may be said here about the relations with the parent State of Jodhpur. It was not to be expected that the triumphal return of Bikaji from Jodhpur with the cherished heirlooms would be forgiven easily by the proud rulers of that State. It was a great blow to their prestige, and up to the time of the present Maharaja, Jodhpur never gave up hope of their recovery. In the result, though often there was cordiality and sometimes even defensive and offensive alliances were formed, no

opportunity was lost by Jodhpur to attack Bikaner and recover, if possible, what it had lost in the time of Rao Bikaji. No less than eight campaigns were undertaken by Jodhpur, but only on one occasion, in A.D. 1542, did it meet with any success. In that year the Ruler of Bikaner was killed in battle and the old fort was captured and nearly half the area of the State came under Jodhpur occupation. This was the lowest depth of adversity to which the State fell in its history. But Rao Kalyan Singhji, who came to the throne in such difficult circumstances, did not despair. He retreated to a distant town, reorganized his forces and set himself quietly to reconquer his lost dominions. He was so successful that in two years' time the Jodhpur garrison in Bikaner was surrounded and agreed to withdraw without even striking a blow. In the other invasions that followed, though the tide often varied and flowed this way and that, final success remained with Bikaner.

Nine times did Bikaner retaliate. In four of these campaigns military success remained with Bikaner. Jodhpur was conquered and the fort occupied, but the victors were satisfied with a display of their superiority, and never entertained ambitions either of conquest or of vengeance. It is pleasant to record that during the reign of the present Maharaja, unbroken cordiality has prevailed between the two States and the old feud has been totally forgotten on both sides.

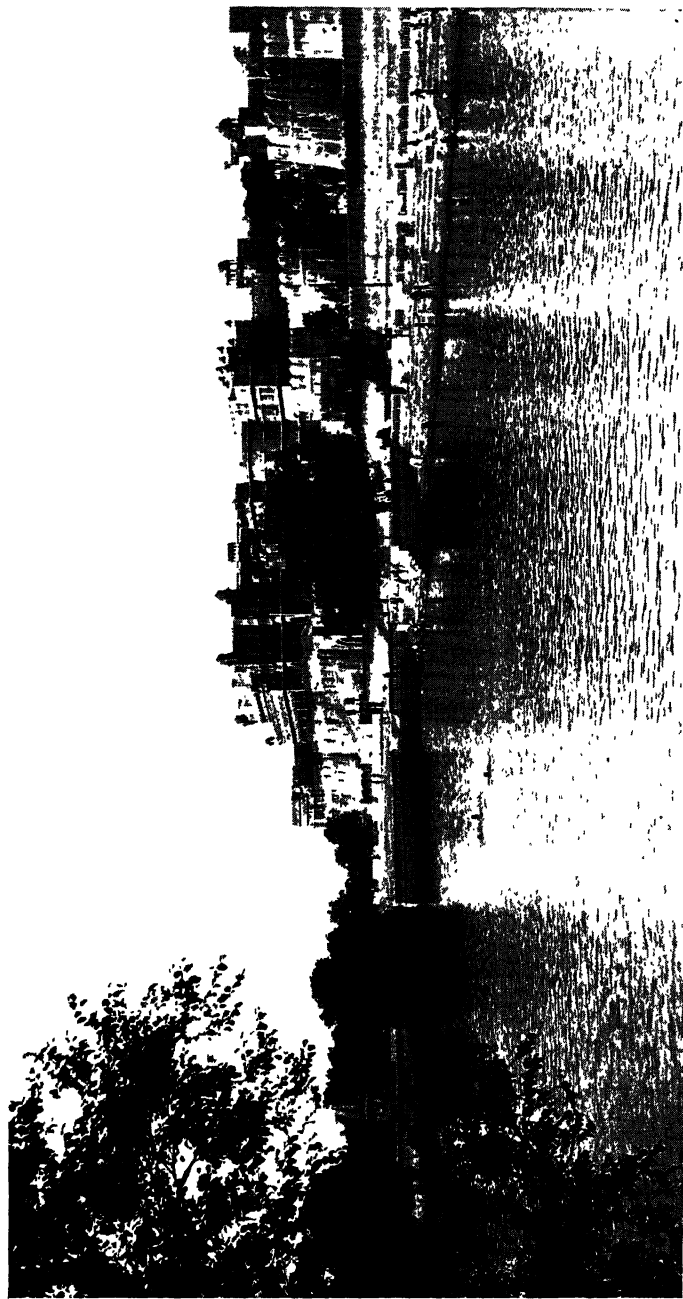
The break-down of civil government in Rajputana following the disintegration of Moghul power, though it enabled Maharaja Surat Singhji to play a leading part in the affairs of Rajput States, had disastrous repercussions on the internal affairs of Bikaner. The refractory nobles, with the help of chiefs outside the State, raised a formidable rebellion. Amir Khan, the head of the Pindari *condottieri*, was the terror of Rajputana at the time, and the Bikaner nobles depending on his support defied

the State authorities. The insurrection showed signs of spreading among other discontented thakurs to whom the strong government of the Maharaja was distasteful. Fortunately at this time the Marquis of Hastings had reversed the policy of his predecessor and decided to extend British protection to the Rajputana States. As with the States liberated from the Mahratta yoke, so with independent Bikaner also a treaty of 'perpetual friendship, alliance and unity of interests' was signed on the 9th of March 1818.

This treaty of alliance, which has, for over 118 years, been the Magna Carta of the Bikaner State and its dynasty, is a document of eleven articles. It establishes an absolute unity of interests between the British Government and the Bikaner State and declares that the friends and enemies of one party shall be the friends and enemies of both. It guarantees the protection of the British Government to the principality and territory of Bikaner, and engages to reduce the thakurs and other inhabitants who have revolted and thrown off its authority. In accordance with the provisions of this Treaty British troops under General Alner entered Bikaner to aid the Maharaja in his campaign against the thakurs. The rebellion was quelled and the British force withdrew soon afterwards.

The British alliance, while it gave security to the State, seems in its early days to have been the cause of confusion and trouble. Sir Thomas Munro, in discussing the effects of British protection in Indian States, wrote :

'It (the subsidiary alliance) has the natural tendency to render the government of every country in which it exists weak and oppressive, to extinguish all honourable spirit among the higher classes of society, to degrade and impoverish the whole people. The usual remedy of a bad government in India is a quiet revolution in the palace or a violent one by rebellion. But the presence of the British force cuts off every chance of remedy by supporting the prince on the throne against any foreign



The Old Fort, Bikaner



and domestic enemy. It renders him insolent by teaching him to trust strangers for his security; cruel and avaricious by showing him that he has nothing to fear from the hatred of his subjects. Where the subsidiary system is introduced the country will soon bear marks of it, in decaying villages and a decreasing population. This has long been observed in the Dominions of the Peishwa and the Nizam.'

Bikaner also, in the early days of its alliance, was not free from the evil effects of the subsidiary alliance. The thakurs and nobles, no longer free to attack their neighbours across the frontier, fell on each other or plundered the villages. Keeping large armed retinues no longer required in the service of their Maharaja, and restless because there were no more wars, they began to defy the authority of the State. The anarchy of a dying feudalism left the Government weak and disorganized. From a military basis the State had slowly to be transformed into a civil administration. The transition was difficult, and was not finally achieved till the reign of the present Ruler.

In the early days of the transition, during the time of Maharaja Ratan Singhji, even the Raja of Mahajan, the premier noble, was in open revolt. The thakurs were in a constant state of disaffection and open defiance, and over large areas State authority practically broke down. In fact the military State had ceased to function and the civil State was yet in its infancy. The reign of Ratan Singhji is a weary tale of insurrections and punitive expeditions, in which by slow degrees the Government obtained the upper hand. But even this period is illumined by a ray of that staunch support to the British Government which was soon to become the leading characteristic of the Bikaner House. During the second Sikh War a body of horse and artillery was provided by the State and co-operated actively with the British forces in the campaign.

During the time of Maharaja Sardar Singhji who succeeded his father, the State may be said to have reached the nadir of its fortunes. The thakurs were in constant revolt and the Maharaja's army was unable to pacify the country or to reduce the thakurs to obedience. The State was encumbered with heavy debt and the annual expenditure was largely in excess of the revenue. There was no safety of life or security of property owing to the depredations of the thakurs. It was during this reign that the Great Mutiny of 1857 broke out and the Maharaja, harassed though he was, never forgot the obligations under the treaty of treating the enemies of the British Government as his own. The record of the State during the Great Mutiny stands out as a golden page in the history of India in those dark days.

The mutiny of the Bengal regiments which broke out in Meerut had spread with lightning rapidity in the areas surrounding Delhi and in what is now known as the United Provinces. Except for the States in Central India, which served as breakwaters, British authority in the whole of North India was practically extinguished. The future of the British Government in India, it was recognized, lay in the attitude of the Punjab. If that recently conquered kingdom, whose armies had been defeated with so much difficulty hardly ten years before, and whose nobility and masses were still discontented, threw in their lot with the rebels and joined hands with the mutineers in Delhi, the doom of the British Empire in India was sealed. The northern boundary of the State of Bikaner marched with the southern boundary of the Punjab. The British districts which touched the State had risen in revolt. Sirsa, Hissar, and Hansi were in the hands of rebel forces. Maharajah Sardar Singhji recognized the necessity of immediate and decisive action, and at the head of his own troops marched without delay to the disaffected area. The forces at his disposal consisted of regular and well-

disciplined infantry and cavalry and a large auxiliary camel force. These were reinforced by the levies raised by the leading nobles which were commanded by them personally. Strengthened by an effective complement of artillery, this force took the field in British India and engaged the rebels in the bordering districts.

Under the personal leadership of the Maharaja, the Bikaner forces covered themselves with glory. The occupation of Hissar, a nodal point commanding the old routes to Delhi, was the main objective of the Maharaja's army. This town was besieged by a strong rebel force and the Maharaja's troops marched against it and relieved the town. They occupied it till the arrival of General van Cortlandt, and in a short period cleared the surrounding area of rebels. The rebels again attacked the town and the Maharaja's bodyguard helped in repulsing the attack. This defeat broke the strength of rebel resistance in this vital area. Another mobile force of 1,000 men with two guns marched to the relief of Hansi, which was also besieged by the rebels, who withdrew after a hard-fought action. A Bikaner garrison of 500 men held the town till the arrival of the General commanding the area. In the attack on Jamalpur, a rebel stronghold, the whole of the Bikaner horse took part, and that force was in a great measure responsible for the success which followed.

Apart from these and other notable actions, the very presence of the Maharaja with his troops in the field had a great moral effect. The support and the personal example of the Maharaja, and the zeal with which he threw himself on the side of the British Government were unexpected sources of strength, when so many rulers were hesitating and so many were powerless to act. Nor is it possible to underestimate the military value of the services rendered by the Maharaja and his troops. If the straight road between the Punjab and



Delhi were covered by the Sikh rulers of the cis-Sutlej States, notably the Maharaja of Patiala, the alternative line of communication was made safe only by the action of the Maharaja of Bikaner. But for his timely action, the discontent might have spread to the Punjab, changing the military complexion of the entire rebellion.

The British authorities fully recognized 'the zeal rare in a native Prince' and 'the warmth and heartiness' the Maharaja displayed on the occasion, and Brigadier-General G. St. P. Lawrence in his official dispatch to the Government of India described as follows the services the Maharaja had rendered at the darkest moment of British Indian history :

'In my despatch of the 6th January 1859, I observed—

SARDAR SINGH, MAHARAJA OF BIKANER, has from the commencement of the outbreak ACTIVELY EXHIBITED THE MOST LOYAL FRIENDSHIP AND DEVOTION TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, AND WARMLY CO-OPERATED WITH US IN THE FIELD. The Government of India is already well acquainted with the Raja's services in rescuing, affording refuge to, and supplying the wants of, several Europeans. The troops of this province were employed under General van Cortlandt in Hansee and Hissar.

THE EXCELLENT CONDUCT OF THE MAHARAJA, WHO AT THE HEAD OF HIS TROOPS PROCEEDED TO HIS OWN FRONTIER, there prepared to join us where and whenever required, PRESENTED A MOST NOTABLE EXAMPLE, not only to his own dependants, but TO THE PRINCES OF RAJPUTANA, AND DISPLAYED A SPIRIT AND ENERGY NOT ELSEWHERE MET WITH.

I consider THE MAHARAJA IS DESERVING OF THE HIGHEST SCALE OF REWARD which the Government may be pleased to sanction TO THE MOST MERITORIOUS OF RAJPUT STATES.

My report of the 31st July 1858 mentioned the good services of this chief and referred Government to the reports of General van Cortlandt and the Government of the Punjab for an account of the aid bestowed on us by His Highness and his troops.

HIS HIGHNESS, WHO AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE OUT-BREAK AT ONCE PROCEEDED TO HIS EXTREME BORDER TO ASSIST US, AND BY HIS COURAGE AND THE EXAMPLE OF HIS LOYALTY CHECKED DISAFFECTION AND GAVE CONFIDENCE TO THE WAVERING.

NO PRINCE IN RAJPUTANA SAVE BIKANER TOOK THE FIELD IN PERSON IN OUR FAVOUR WITHOUT HESITATION;

NO PRINCE GAVE THE LIKE AID IN SEARCHING OUT AND RESCUING FUGITIVES, though all gave their hospitable shelter and support,

AND NO OTHER PRINCE EXHIBITED SUCH PURELY DISINTERESTED MOTIVES IN GIVING US HIS ACTIVE ASSISTANCE;

AND NONE BUT THE BIKANER RAJA SUFFERED SO HEAVY A LOSS OF RAJPUT KINDRED AND CHIEFS WHILST FIGHTING PURELY IN OUR CAUSE.

IT WAS FOR THESE REASONS THAT I CONSIDERED, AND STILL CONSIDER, THE LOYALTY AND GOOD SERVICES OF THE BIKANER RAJA SUPERIOR TO THOSE OF ANY OTHER CHIEF IN RAJPUTANA, INCLUDING JAIPUR.

. . . . .  
If I have exceeded the limits of my duty in bringing this case before His Excellency, the sense of justice to a FAITHFUL ALLY, and of consciousness that my Government would not desire to allow THIS REALLY VALUABLE SERVICE OF THE BIKANER CHIEF to go unrewarded, must be my excuse, which I feel confident will be accepted by His Lordship.'

Thus even in the days of weakness the Maharaja maintained the true traditions of his House. As was justly remarked by a distinguished British Official in his narrative of the *Crisis in the Punjab*:

'The efforts of Their Highnesses of Patiala, Bikaner, and Kapurthala will ever stand forth in history as noble instances of Asiatic honour under circumstances of unparalleled temptation. All had their own fancied or real wrongs to urge; and be it said in vindication of their delicacy, they did not select the season of embarrassment either to expatiate on them or to extract promises.'

The services of the Maharaja were fully appreciated by Queen Victoria, who through the Secretary of State for India sent the following illuminated *kharita* which was presented in durbar with due formality to His Highness:

INDIA OFFICE, LONDON,  
December 15th 1859.

Highness,

I have been honored with the commands of the Queen to acknowledge the receipt of Your Highness's letter and to express the gratification with which Her Majesty has perused the assurances of Friendship which it contains.

Her Majesty is deeply sensible of the loyalty and devotion displayed by Your Highness during the recent period of trouble in India, and highly appreciates the assistance which you rendered to her army and to her Government. It is in such times that the true quality of friendship is best tested; and it will ever be among the most cherished recollections of Her Majesty that Your Highness and other princely representatives of the ancient houses of Rajpootana were, during the eventful years which have just passed, among the most steadfast of her friends.

That Your Highness may enjoy length of days and continued prosperity is the earnest prayer of

Your Highness's faithful friend and well-wisher,

CHARLES WOOD.

Maharaja Sardar Singhji was a real prince in the genuine Indian tradition. Ninety-nine elephants filled his stables and he kept up a military establishment which, in the financial circumstances of State, was disproportionate to its needs. We have the first-hand description of the court of the Maharaja from a military officer who visited him in his capital. As a true pen picture of the Maharaja and his court, at the time, the description is interesting:

'We reached the fort just as the Maharaja had emerged through its gateway, seated grandly in a state "peenus" or Sedan chair, borne by men in scarlet livery. This fine conveyance was emblazoned with designs in gold, and set round with

deep gold fringes, a rich silk canopy covering it, reared at the corners upon shafts of gold. After the customary salutations called Istikbal, or greetings on meeting, I rode rapidly back to receive the Maharaja on his arrival at our house, on his presently reaching which, two other salutes were fired, one for himself and one for me. This was done from two twelve-pounder guns of burnished brass, brought down to our place for the purpose, his own golundaz, or artillerymen, working them. They regulated the salutes admirably. I then ceremoniously conducted our Visitor up the steps. He accomplished this with some difficulty from his lameness, leaning heavily on my arm to conceal the infirmity. Our conversation at this interview was varied—of the natural products of the country once more, and how properly to develop them; of steamships, railways, the late Durbar held at Agra, and of the advance of the Russians, about which the Maharaja was particularly curious. After a while, I, in my turn, gave His Highness his rookhsut with the same ceremony as observed towards myself in my visit. This simply was to slightly touch his breast and arms with some uttur served from his own gold cruse, accompanied by a few words of friendliness and good-will, and to dismiss his three or four attendant Courtiers in the like manner. I then conducted the Maharaja back to his “peenus” (or sella gestatoria) on his being lifted away in which, followed by his numerous train, he was again saluted from the brass cannon—the flare from the uplifted flambeaux lighting up the scene, and displaying the quaint but orderly pageant. There was no hubbub, no shouts or exclamations, nor any confusion such as are the ordinary accompaniments of a Rajah’s procession; no crowding or hustling, but every one in his proper place, and every one in Court dress. I observed that a large loaded pistol was laid by his side after he had seated himself in his tukht-i-rowan, or royal travelling litter. His own attire was the usual Rajpootanah long robe, the skirts thereof in the amplest folds or pleatings; a finely hilted dagger in his waist-band, a handsomely sheathed sword held in his right hand, some diamond rings on his fingers, rich gold bracelets on his wrists, and a deep necklace of large pearls with a fine large single emerald drop suspended at its centre, his tall head-gear

being decorated with the diamond aigrette in the shape of the figure 6, peculiar to Rajpoot princes; and a superb diamond frontlet of a single stone, pendent over his forehead from the front part of his head-dress.”<sup>1</sup>

This pomp and display coupled with diminishing revenue and lack of effective political organization led naturally to disastrous results. The chiefs and nobles defied the authority of the State. Dacoity was widely prevalent, and the Government, while it maintained a brave show at the capital, was ineffective outside its immediate neighbourhood. The feudatories maintained independent courts and kept up large armed retinues with which they oppressed and plundered the neighbouring areas. The State was unable to check their plundering habits, and we have in Captain Powlett’s *Gazetteer of Bikaner* a description of their life:

‘Every one who has the means possesses a small fort which is surrounded by a rampart of sand supported by phog twigs . . . , and within it are usually (or were till recently) found more houses than the ostensible means of the owner justify his keeping. When a decoity at some distant point is contemplated the Thakur gives his horse a daily allowance of ghi (clarified butter) for some time previously in order to fit them for extraordinary exertion, and then, banded with some active neighbours, they make a long night journey, often guided by the stars, to the spot which they wish to reach. Here till the arrival of the victims they will lie hidden under a mound or a thin hedge. The booty, which usually consists of camels and their burdens, including perhaps the wife of a rich bania, is then hurried off without delay.’

Naturally, without a police force, without an effective administration, the State had fallen into chaos and confusion.

From the decay which had overtaken the State administration, and the weakening of its authority over the

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *The Records of Crime*, by General Hervey, pp. 206-8.

thakurs, and the financial bankruptcy which threatened it, the State was rescued by the wisdom, courage, and statesmanship of Maharaja Dungar Singhji who succeeded to the throne on the 16th of May 1872. The condition of Bikaner at the time of his accession was indeed deplorable. The revenue of the State had fallen so low as Rs. 5 lakhs, while the treasury was in debt to the extent of Rs. 8½ lakhs. Neither roads, nor schools, nor hospitals existed. A large and untrained army, kept up on the basis of earlier traditions, swallowed the revenues of the State. There was no regular administration in the modern sense of the word, and the entire energy of the Ruler and his ministers was devoted to the maintenance of a precarious authority over the thakurs and nobles. Maharaja Sardar Singhji had left only amorganatic son, not entitled to succeed to the throne. By Rajput custom an heir had therefore to be adopted from the collateral branches nearest to the Ruler. The head of the Dalel-singhote Branch which was nearest of kin to Maharaja Sardar Singhji was Maharaj Lall Singhji, grandson of Maharaj Chattar Singhji, and a cousin of the reigning Maharaja. Lall Singhji was therefore the heir-presumptive, but as is customary, the dowager Maharani preferred that some one younger should succeed, and Maharaj Lall Singhji's son Dungar Singhji was adopted as son and successor to Maharaja Sirdar Singhji.

A Council of Regency carried on the administration during the minority of the Maharaja. At the age of eighteen the Maharaja assumed full powers and he set himself without delay to modernize his administration. He divided the State into regular districts and tehsils, and appointed district officers to carry on the administration. The pernicious system of farming land revenue was abolished and direct recovery on the basis of fixed principles of assessment was substituted. He organized a regular police force and put down dacoity with a

heavy hand, giving security of life and property to his people. Regular courts of law were established, and laws based on British Indian models were adopted and promulgated in the State. The finances of the State were reformed and many revenue-bearing schemes were taken in hand. Nor were the Maharaja's schemes devoted solely to the purpose of improving his administration and securing larger revenue. The welfare of his people was always near his heart. He founded hospitals and dispensaries and gave the benefits of modern medical science to his people. The first State schools were opened by him and throughout the land education was made free, in firm belief of the old Hindu doctrine that knowledge should be open to all. The teaching of English was also introduced in the schools. Maharaja Dungar Singhji was not content with administrative reforms. He was anxious to re-establish the position of his State in Rajputana by the utilization of the most modern scientific methods. It is characteristic of his far-sighted vision that as early as 1886 he installed electric power in his capital when the use of electricity was but little known in India and had certainly not been introduced into any other State.

An interesting story is still told of the unbelieving wonder with which the people of Bikaner saw the installation of electric light. The European electrical engineer was very mysterious in his preparations, and the people of Bikaner were frankly sceptical of his ability to produce light from wires. All the engineer's testings were carried out in secret, and as weeks wore on and no light was still to be seen, the wisecracks of the capital began to ridicule openly the very idea that any one could produce light out of such mechanical operations. Finally all the preparations were completed and the engineer approached the Maharaja to turn on the main switch. The Maharaja, who was a firm believer in modern methods honoured

Mr. Robinson by asking him to turn on the lights himself. The electrician was a man of spectacular imagination, and he had taken care to instal a large number of very powerful lights and arc lamps to illuminate the Palace all at once and strike the imagination of the people with his magical skill. He turned on the switch himself, and thousands of lights blazed forth at the same time to the confusion and amazement of the crowd.

The Maharaja was extremely eager to extend to his State the benefits of canal irrigation and railway communication. Anxious to mitigate the horrors of famine, he interested himself in these schemes. A proposal for a broad-gauge railway connecting Sind with Delhi via Jaisalmer and Bikaner was actually considered. With regard to canal irrigation His Highness more than once addressed the Government of India. He wrote:

‘There is a great portion of the State lying waste. Our people and cattle are subject to the greatest ravages of famine and suffer seriously from deficiency of water. We shall cheerfully bear all the expenditure. Cannot something be done to afford us relief? If it is not possible to do so now, will the request made and the needs and the interests of the Bikaner State be borne in mind and water be given to the thirsty but fertile plains of Suratgarh Nizamat whenever any irrigation scheme in the future may render that feasible?’

The unceasing vigilance with which Maharaja Dungar Singhji looked after the welfare of the people and the reforms he introduced soon bore fruit. During his reign of fifteen years the State revenue was more than trebled. When Maharaja Dungar Singhji succeeded the revenue of the State was but Rs. 5 lakhs of rupees. When His Highness died the revenue had risen to over 16 lakhs. Heavy debts and claims amounting to over Rs. 35 lakhs (or more than seven years’ revenue) when His Highness assumed authority were settled. Not only did he, with very limited resources, carry out various reforms, but



there was left in the State treasury when he died the sum of nearly Rs. 5 lakhs.

Two characteristic reforms of Maharaja Dungar Singhji may be mentioned here. The Maharaja saw the great importance of growing trees in his desert land, and on all road-sides and in other suitable places had large numbers of them planted giving shelter alike to man and to beast. The value of tree-planting for rainfall and to prevent erosion of the soil was then little appreciated, but Maharaja Dungar Singhji, with far-sighted wisdom, laid down the policy of planting of trees which his successor has carried out so extensively. Another most important reform which the Maharaja carried out was the abolition of *begar*—a system by which the State servants when visiting villages exacted free labour and requisitioned food, fodder, and grain without payment. This system which was prevalent in most States was a source of great oppression, and the Maharaja was one of the first in India to abolish it.

Maharaja Dungar Singhji may truly be called the maker of modern Bikaner and it is not in any sense of exaggeration that the people of Bikaner have inscribed on his monument the words :

‘Benevolent and sagacious Ruler, beloved by all his people and subjects, who by his prudence and foresight opened the gates for the advancement of Bikaner along the paths of modern progress, who constantly strove for the happiness and prosperity of those whom he governed, and who was renowned for his piety and charity of disposition.’

But Maharaja Dungar Singhji for all his toil in the interests of the State was not destined to have a peaceful reign. The turbulent nobles, so long accustomed to virtual independence in their own forts, were alarmed at the reforming zeal of the Maharaja and his earnest attempts to create a modern administration. They saw in the Maharaja’s activities grave danger to their own

privileges. A widespread revolt was organized which the Maharaja was unable to put down. He was compelled to ask for the services of British troops, and the nobles yielded only when it was clear that to persist in rebellion might cause disaster to themselves. The military intervention of the British Government had its usual results. The rebellious nobles, though nominally punished by deposition, gained more than they lost. Their estates were left practically untouched, while the Maharaja's own powers were largely interfered with. The results were disastrous. The nobles learnt the lesson that rebellion, if only it could be organized on a wide scale, was a paying thing, and that if British intervention resulted, it was not the rebels who would lose but the Ruler himself. The incalculable mischief which resulted from this idea will become clear as the story of Maharaja Ganga Singhji's reign unfolds itself. Its immediate effects were equally disastrous. Maharaja Dungar Singhji was heart-broken. Shortly afterwards he died (August 19, 1887) at the early age of thirty-three, after a reign of fifteen years.

In his private life Maharaja Dungar Singhji was esteemed by all as one of the outstanding Princes of his time. His charity and piety were well known. He endowed liberally many charitable institutions. A dignified and gallant figure standing well over six feet in height, of splendid physique and handsome features, he was indeed the embodiment of Rathore and Rajput manhood. Chivalrous and courteous by nature, the Maharaja felt and conducted himself as one of the people. Maharaja Ganga Singhji is never tired of acknowledging not only the debt he owes to his predecessor, but the inspiration that the life and achievements of Maharaja Dungar Singhji have given to him.

'No Maharaja of Bikaner', said His Highness once, 'has deserved better of his people than his late Highness. He did all that he

could—and no man could do more than that—for their well-being, prosperity, and contentment. His high sense of duty, his genuine sympathy and solicitude for his people, and his sagacity and perspicacity laid the foundations for those developments of which we are to-day gathering the fruits.’

## *Chapter Two*

### BIRTH AND EARLY EDUCATION

**M**AHARAJA DUNGAR SINGHJI had not been blessed with a son. In the later years of his reign the question of succession was a matter of deep concern to him. When, therefore, it was announced that his father Maharaj Lall Singhji was soon to be father again, the matter was considered to be one of the highest political importance affecting the succession of the State and the future of the dynasty.

It was at half-past ten on the Vijaya Dasami Day, sacred to all Hindus as celebrating the victory of Sri Ram Chandraj, that the birth of another son to Maharaj Lall Singhji, the future Maharaja Ganga Singhji, took place. The day and the hour are considered auspicious by the Hindus, and especially for Kshatriyas, and the court astrologers predicted a glorious future for the little Prince.

Maharaj Lall Singhji was a Prince of outstanding abilities and was held in high esteem by all for his piety and kindheartedness. During the minority of his elder son, Maharaja Dungar Singhji, and even during the earlier period of his rule, Lall Singhji was closely associated with the administration. He held the responsible post of President of the State Council for four years after Maharaja Dungar Singhji assumed full powers, and had in that capacity a share in all the important measures and reforms carried out during the reign of the late Maharaja. An honourable and upright man, gifted with great tact and sympathy, he maintained the most cordial relations with his son even after the latter had become Maharaja. It is no uncommon thing in Indian States to see strained relations between a son adopted into a ruling family and

the natural father. The son cannot forget that he is the Ruler and the father is only a subject; the father being human cannot forget his natural relationship and is inclined to assert his position. The result generally is unfortunate. The case of Maharaj Lall Singhji and the Maharaja Dungar Singhji was, however, different. The Maharaja delighted always to honour and show the greatest possible respect and consideration to his father, while the father never forgot that whatever the nature of their private relationship, his son was the Ruler and was entitled to homage, respect, and obedience from all his subjects.

The mother of the Maharaja was a lady of remarkable personality and charm. She was the second wife of Maharaj Lall Singhji, the first having died shortly after the birth of Dungar Singhji. The Maharaja cherished the utmost love and veneration for his mother and always claimed that one of the most important influences in his life was the character and pious disposition of his mother.

From his early childhood Ganga Singhji, as heir presumptive, was brought up in the royal apartments under the loving care of his parents and the supervision of the Maharaja himself. But destiny soon called him to a higher station. The young Prince was hardly seven years old when Maharaja Dungar Singhji passed away in the prime of his life. It was a warm August evening and the boy, without a care in the world, was playing with his companions in one of the shaded courtyards of the old palace in the fort. His game was interrupted by the sudden appearance of two venerable court dignitaries whose gravity of mien announced that something serious had happened. The important thing was to get the boy changed into suitable clothes for he was, as usual, clad in bright-coloured clothes with gold braid. With practised tact the Prince—now Maharaja—was wheedled to his suite of apartments and persuaded to change into more

sober clothes and led away to accept the homage of his people.

The proclamation that Ganga Singhji had succeeded his brother took place immediately, but the ceremonies of installation could only be performed after the thirteen days of pollution decreed by Hindu law were over. On the 31st of August the young Maharaja ascended the throne of his ancestors in the presence of the chiefs and nobles and high officials of the State.

The installation of a Hindu ruler is essentially a religious act in which recognition of the ruler's direct mission from God forms the most important part. Innumerable ceremonies have to be gone through, some symbolic, some with a direct meaning, all meant to impress on the ruler his duty to God and his people. The day opens with the anointment in sacred oil and a purificatory bath in saffron water. Thus purified to receive the grace of God, the ruler begins his religious ceremonies worshipping first Sri Ganesh, the God of prosperity and the remover of all obstacles. After the religious ceremonies, the young Maharaja is robed in the traditional court dress and is led to the throne room, where is kept the golden *simhasan* (throne) of his ancestors. Approaching it reverentially, he does obeisance to it three times and then turns to the four principal hereditary nobles of the State standing on the right and left of the throne. They then request the Maharaja that by the grace of God and of the tutelary deities of the State and House of Bikaner, he may be pleased to ascend the throne.

As the Maharaja takes his seat on the *simhasan* 121 guns from the State battery thunder a royal salute (101 as usual and 21 to indicate that he is the 21st Ruler of the State<sup>1</sup>) and the *Naubat Khana*—silent during the court mourning—announces the joyous news. Then follows the *tilak* ceremony—that of putting the royal mark on the

<sup>1</sup> Even numbers being inauspicious: hence 121 instead of 122.

forehead of the ruler. The first to do so is the Chowdari of Sekhsar, the descendant of the Godara Jats whom Rao Bikaji conquered to found his State. Then follow the four 'sirayats', the principal Chiefs: the Raja of Mahajan, the premier noble of the State and descended from Rao Bikaji himself; the Thakur of Bidasar, descended from Rao Bidaji, brother of Rao Bikaji, and head of the Bida-wat clan; the Rawat of Rawatsar, equal in rank with the Thakur of Bidasar and descended from the great Rao Khandalji; and the Thakur of Bhukarka, another descendant of Bikaji. After them comes the head of the Shani Parihars of Belasar—the descendants of Belaji, the Master of the Horse who accompanied Bikaji in his career of conquest.

The importance of this ceremony, which imprints on the minds of every new ruler the romantic circumstances of the foundation of his State, cannot be exaggerated. It is in fact a re-enactment in every generation of the great drama of Rao Bikaji's life and emphasizes to the new Ruler the integral connexion between his house, his State, and his nobles. The descendant of every important companion of Rao Bikaji takes part in the solemn ceremony, and the covenant made over four hundred years ago between their ancestors is silently renewed: the Ruler to protect them, and they to stand loyally and faithfully by him in all his undertakings.

The worship of the *Rajchinnahs* or the emblems of sovereignty follows. The Chhattra—the State umbrella—the old Hindu emblem of protection, *chamwar*, the yak fan, and the throne are all worshipped in turn. The royal arms come next. The sword, the dagger, the shield, the spear, the bow and arrow, the horse, the elephant, and the drums indicative of the Kshatriya's profession of arms, are each worshipped.

After having thus ascended the throne and prepared himself by worshipping the *Rajchinnahs* and the arms, the

young Ruler, with the help of the priests, performs the religious part of the *tilak* ceremony. The coronation ceremony is now complete.

The Ruler then accepts the homage of his nobles and officers who, led by the members of the royal family, present *nazar* to him. That brings the *Rajyabhishek* to a close, and the Maharaja at the end of it visits the temples in the fort to offer thanks to God and to pray for the well-being of the State.

Maharaj Lall Singhji, who had thus seen his second son also ascending the throne of Bikaner, did not survive long after this event. On the 16th of September 1887, a fortnight after the installation of Ganga Singhji, Maharaj Lall Singhji passed away. The Maharaja was thus deprived, from the beginning of his reign, of the guidance of his father. That His Highness has always felt this loss sorely is evident from the speech which he made in 1915 when unveiling the statue of his father. 'Although I was only seven years of age', he said, 'when it pleased Providence to call him away, my recollections of those early years are abundantly enriched by his fatherly love and solicitude.' And he went on to add: 'To his eldest son, he was a very real guide, philosopher, and friend, in spite of the fact that in his late years failing health prevented him from actively continuing his great work as President of the Council.'

During the minority, the State was to be governed by a Council, and arrangements were made by the Government of India for the training and upbringing of the young Maharaja in a manner suited to his high position.

All over the world the minority of a ruler is a period of doubt and uncertainty for the State, of political and other complications which may have far-reaching effects. In India especially this has been so. The minority administration in Gwalior after the death of Maharaja Jiyaji Rao had opened the eyes of the Government of



India and the Indian Rulers to the unfortunate results which an uncontrolled Council of Regency might produce in a State. The Government of India had therefore evolved a policy which verged almost on the feudal theory of wardship. The Paramount Power claimed to stand in the position of a trustee during the minority of a ruler and in that capacity to assert the right to supervise effectively the administration of the State, and to make arrangements for the education of the minor Prince. Though the original object was the interest of the State itself, it was soon discovered that the minority period afforded opportunities for introducing new methods of administration and for changing the long-established traditions and usages of the States, which the British Government was at that time inclined to look upon as old-fashioned and unprogressive.

The suspicion with which regency administrations are looked upon by the rulers and their constant complaint is that under régimes set up during minorities their rights are bartered away by officials nominated by the Government of India; that the cherished traditions of their dynasties and people are changed without due consideration, and that the rulers themselves are educated and brought up more with a view to approximate to British ideas than to Indian ideals of kingship. The strenuous fight that the Maharaja himself led in later years for a change in this policy of Government was a result, no doubt, of his own experience as a minor ruler during a long period of regency.

The Council of Regency which was set up during the Maharaja's minority was presided over by the Political Agent. Nor was this merely a nominal honour. Besides powers of supervision over all other departments in charge of the other members, he had also direct control over some of the most important departments of the State. The powers of the members of Council were not

defined and there was no decentralization of work. Practically everything big or small was referred to the President, who being busy with his own normal work as Political Agent, was unable to devote due attention to the affairs of the State. Naturally intrigues flourished and corruption went on unchecked; district officers relieved from the watchful eye of the Maharaja reverted to bad old ways, and the people of Bikaner felt the truth of the old adage that it is ill for a kingdom when its ruler is a minor.

But the Council were anxious to do their best. They dutifully carried out the administrative reforms of Maharaja Dungar Singhji. A revised settlement of land revenue was made and during the year 1892-3 the settlement of Khalsa villages was completed resulting in a demand of Rs. 3,99,054. In 1894 a department was created for the management of the estates whose thakurs were minors and to settle disputes between different claimants. An attempt was made also to put into effect Maharaja Dungar Singhji's desire to open up the country by railways. A beginning was made and the Regency Council was responsible for a short line of 89.75 miles in the State.

The people of Bikaner remember with gratitude some of the work of Sir Charles Bayley as President. In addition to his other great services he was instrumental in thoroughly reorganizing the entire judicial machinery of the State. Qualified men were recruited for judicial appointments and the whole system was modelled on the institutions of British India. The improvement effected by these reforms was such that for many years after His Highness assumed full powers the necessity for reorganizing the system did not arise.

The Council in the last year of its régime also took in hand, at the desire of the Maharaja, the construction of a new palace. The old fort built in the sixteenth century had been for nearly four hundred years the official residence of

Bikaner Rulers. From the point of view of architecture, the fort is one of the most magnificent buildings in India. Gradually added to by different rulers, it was an unwieldy pile of buildings which did not lend itself to the arrangements and conveniences of the present day. The Maharaja, therefore, desired the construction of a modern residence, where he could live with less orthodoxy and more freedom. The famous Lallgarh Palace was the result. Originally designed by the English architect, Sir Swinton Jacob, the palace as completed was the work of the hereditary craftsmen of Bikaner. Its beautiful carving and filigree work, the marvellous interior decoration, which rivals the work of the state rooms in the old palace, the frescoes and mural paintings, were all executed by the local craftsmen. Built of pink sandstone, with beautifully laid out gardens and marble courtyards, the Lallgarh Palace in its grandeur and beauty is a fitting residence for the Maharajas of Bikaner.

But apart from the administrative reforms mentioned above and the building of the Lallgarh Palace, the work of the Regency Council may be said to have been altogether barren. The Council had no proper appreciation of the traditions of a great State and with the indifference of bureaucrats introduced changes which affected the prestige of the State. The right to mint coins, a cherished symbol of sovereignty, was given up for a period of thirty years. In disregard of local traditions, sentiments, and even the convenience of the people, Hindi was replaced by Urdu, a language totally foreign to the State and alien to the culture of the people. This was done almost exclusively in the interests of the officials who were mainly recruited from outside. Nothing was done to improve the finances of the State or to reorganize the administrative machinery. Education and public health were practically neglected. The medical department was under a British officer who, while he received his salary

from the State, was responsible only to the Government of India.

The long period of Regency left an indelible mark on the mind of the Maharaja. Speaking on the occasion of the coming of age of the heir apparent, His Highness recalled the difficulties of the State during the minority and said:

‘There are certain aspects of a Regency administration which States like Bikaner with their bitter experience of the past naturally find it impossible to forget, even though they may appreciate some of the advantages which have accrued during such periods in Bikaner. . . . As in the past, so in the future, we cannot exclude the possibility of local traditions, sentiment and feeling being arbitrarily ignored or overridden by them, or, what is even worse, of individuals in their anxiety to gain or retain power or influence or for other undesirable motives involving the State in a network of intrigue, and leaving to the young Ruler when he comes of age a legacy of hate and other evils which it would take a great many years to combat and overcome.’

Though this speech was made twenty-two years after His Highness assumed full powers, it was evident that time had not healed the wounds of the time completely. The minority administration left for the Maharaja a legacy which it took many years of patient toil and constant vigilance to combat as will be seen later. Especially in the relations of the State with the chiefs and nobles, the period of the Regency had created problems which the members of the Council did not then appreciate, but the full weight of which the Ruler had to bear at a later time. No wonder the Maharaja, even after twenty-two years, could not completely conceal the disappointment in his heart.

The Maharaja's education was one of the major concerns of the Regency and of its President, the Political Agent. His early teaching was entrusted to Rai Sahib

Pandit Ram Chandra Dube. From the beginning the Maharaja gave evidence of more than ordinary intellectual power. His study was well regulated and besides a regular literary course, included a system of military training. True to Rajput traditions, from boyhood the Maharaja was a keen soldier and took equal pleasure in his studies as on his saddle.

Home training for a prince who has already succeeded to the throne is fraught with obvious dangers. Self-seekers and sycophants abound in every court, especially when the strong hand of a ruler is absent. Anxious always to please their master and considering every word of his to be a royal command, the palace entourage seldom gives a minor ruler a fair chance. Tutors and guardians in private employ are, generally speaking, little better. In fact the problem of the education of minor princes has been one of such great difficulty that the Government of India have been specially concerned about it for a considerable time. The Government's own solution has been to recommend minor rulers to be sent to the Princes' Colleges established in different centres. This system has undoubtedly many weaknesses. A ruler is brought up without contact with his own people and without knowledge of his State's history. The European staff in the Chiefs' Colleges have generally neither an appreciation of Indian history nor any desire that their pupils should grow up with a lively sense of duty to their States. Their outlook is purely English and European, and they hold dogmatically that what is good for Englishmen should be good enough for Indians; so the education they impart is directed mainly towards imbuing the principles of loyalty to the British Government and of convincing the young Princes in their charge of the superiority of everything European. In consequence the alumni of the Chiefs' Colleges, though speaking faultless English, possessed of excellent table manners, and playing



H.H. The Maharaja in his ninth year



good cricket and polo, have not, generally speaking, been a great success as rulers. Undoubtedly there have been exceptions, notably the Maharaja of Bikaner himself; but such exceptions only prove the rule.

The decision that the Regency Council had to take was, therefore, not an easy one. The choice was frankly between two evils, and the Council showed some courage in choosing what was in the circumstances of the time the lesser evil in sending young Maharaja Ganga Singhji to the Mayo College at Ajmer, when he was just nine years old. The Maharaja was a resident pupil there for five years (1890-1 to 1894-5).

The Maharaja's record at the College was an evidence both of his natural ability and of his application. In all the classes he gained the first prize for English. In almost all the other subjects he stood second in every class. Early in his school days he also manifested a remarkable gift for speaking and elocution, which in later years was to mark him out as one of the leading speakers in the Empire. Gifted with a resonant voice and speaking English with a purity rarely attained by foreigners, and without a trace of accent, the Maharaja established a reputation even at the College as a speaker and debater of ability. He generally stood first in the competitive recitation of English poetry which took place annually at the school.

The Maharaja left the Mayo College in 1895 when he was only fourteen. It was necessary that the ruler of a premier Rajput State with great military traditions should receive his training in the army. Equally it was necessary that as the ruler would soon have to be entrusted with the exercise of his full sovereign powers, he should gain knowledge of administrative affairs and experience of official business. For this purpose the Government of India, who had been approached, selected an officer who by his character and accomplishments was in their opinion



suitable for the post. Mr. Brian Egerton (later Sir Brian Egerton, K.C.I.E.) was the person on whom the choice fell. No selection could have been happier. Sir Brian combined sympathy and tact with firmness and a wholesome belief in discipline. Scion of an old English family of high standing in Cheshire, an accomplished and well-read gentleman, a keen sportsman, of distinguished manners and fine bearing, Brian Egerton won the affection of his young charge from the very beginning. There was one trait in his character, the absolute identification of his interests with those of the young Maharaja, which touched the sensitive heart of the Rajput Prince. The Maharaja is fond of repeating a story which brings out this characteristic of his tutor. In the Maharaja's own words:

'Sir Brian came here in the pleasant month of July<sup>1</sup> before the rains had broken. We were then living in the Fort, in that part of the old palace which had only recently been partly completed—minus electric light, minus electric fans, minus *khas tattis*, and minus water pipes; in short minus all the modern conveniences which I hope are to be found in Lallgarh. I remember that in the absence of the British Resident at the time the senior British officer present, Colonel Tom French-Mullen, who was our doctor here, insisted or attempted to insist that Sir Brian must not stay in the Fort as it was impossible for a European to stay there. But his response—and we all know what it must have been—was that his place was with his ward and he insisted on residing in the Fort.'

With so high-minded, conscientious, and sympathetic a tutor, the young Maharaja made steady progress, not only in his studies but in all manly accomplishments. 'He taught me to ride and to shoot,' says the Maharaja a year and a half after the arrival of Sir Brian. 'I did not care for either but now I am awfully fond of both. He

<sup>1</sup> This is ironic. July in Bikaner before the rains break is the most unpleasant month in the desert summer of Rajputana.

has taught me many more things and his kindness is more than I can express.'

From Sir Brian the Maharaja also received his administrative training. He studied the files which came up to the Regency Council, inspected the work in the different offices at the head-quarters, attended as a silent but interested witness the meetings of the Council. It is not possible to believe that, precocious as the Maharaja was, attendance at these meetings could have been anything more than a duty to be endured without complaint. But it must at least have had one benefit. It must have kept the wisecracks of the Council guessing as to what was passing through the head of the young Ruler who was so strangely grave and attentive to business, and whose affairs they were administering on his behalf and in his name.

The military training also progressed side by side. Alive to the traditions of the family the Maharaja took more than ordinary interest in this aspect of his education. The Bikaner Army at that time was not the modern and efficient force that it is to-day, and the opportunities for really first-class training were not available with his own troops. The Maharaja was therefore sent in 1898 for training to Deoli with the Deoli Regiment under the command of Lt.-Col. J. A. Bell. That regiment had then the reputation of being one of the smartest in India. On return from training the Maharaja was given command of the Sadul Light Infantry. With natural keenness he attended to his duties and it is to the Maharaja's training that the regiment still owes its smart marching which is so greatly admired.

Two notable events happened during the minority of His Highness. One was the reconciliation with Jodhpur. Since the time of the foundation of the State by Rao Bikaji, the relations between the parent State of Jodhpur and the senior branch of the dynasty at Bikaner were

never quite happy. Though there were intervals of cordiality and friendship, necessitated by interstatal circumstances, the background of relationship was one of rivalry and jealousy amounting almost to a family feud. During the time of the Maharaja's minority, Maharaja Jaswant Singhji reigned over Jodhpur. Maharaja Jaswant Singhji wisely realized that to continue this tradition of fratricidal strife was entirely unnecessary in the changed circumstances of the time. A reconciliation was therefore effected early in the Maharaja's minority which brought to a close the 400 years of estrangement. Visits and other formal courtesies were exchanged between the Maharaja, then ten years old, and his cousin of Jodhpur. Maharaja Ganga Singhji was by this wise act enabled during his reign to cultivate relations of cordiality and friendship with the other branch of his family.

The second event was the visit of the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, in 1896. Absence of railway communications had made such visits impossible earlier, and therefore the occasion was in many respects a unique one. The Maharaja took part in all the official functions and made an extraordinary impression by the manliness of his bearing, and the untutored dignity with which he went through all the ceremonies. As Lord Elgin declared in his banquet speech: 'I am confident that the appearances which His Highness made in the durbar, on the parade ground, and here at this table have given every promise that when his time comes he will fully discharge the duties of the Ruler of this State.'

The Maharaja was approaching marriageable age and it was part of the duty of the Regency Council to arrange for a suitable match. The bride selected was a princess of Pratapgarh. It is no easy task to find a suitable alliance for a great Indian Prince. The priests, the astrologers, and others entitled to be consulted gain for such occasions a prominence usually denied to them. Horoscopes have to

be matched, deputations must proceed hither and thither with due formality. Minute details have to be settled according to long-established tradition. The Regency Council had in all these matters the guidance of the mother of the Maharaja.

The wedding was celebrated with great *éclat* on the 7th of July 1897.

The happy years spent with Sir Brian had a further result. The Maharaja gained a thorough insight into English character and he learnt to appreciate the great qualities of the British race. He came to be perfectly at home in their company, with a full knowledge of the courtesies, manners, and conduct appropriate to the best European society. But at no time, even in those early days, was he anything other than a great Rajput Prince. That false modernism of many of the younger princes, who in their desire to imitate European modes and manners, forget their own social and cultural inheritance, never affected him. Sir Brian's influence was always on the side of tradition modified by circumstances. Sir Brian held that as an Indian Prince and as a Rajput, it was necessary that in his relations with his people, in the government of his State and in his own personal life, the Maharaja should be the embodiment of Indian culture and tradition: that at the same time he should have the advantages of modern education, and of the accomplishments necessary for success in the changed conditions of India. Thus, while Sir Brian helped the Maharaja to extract from the West a special knowledge of the West, he impressed on his young charge that true greatness for him lay in remaining an Indian and a Rajput with a genuine pride in his own race and country.

Naturally the Maharaja has cherished the memory of his old friend and tutor. In fact till very recently Sir Brian was an honoured annual visitor to Bikaner, and his kindly eye always shone with pride when he saw all that

the Maharaja had achieved during his reign. And the Maharaja himself is never tired of singing his praise and acknowledging the great debt which he and the State owe to Sir Brian. In the words of the Maharaja, 'he can never let any opportunity go by without expressing his deepest sense of indebtedness which he can never adequately repay by words or deeds to his old tutor and dearest friend who is the embodiment of all the qualities of courage, sympathy, and unselfish devotion to duty'.

There were others who also at this early age influenced the Maharaja. Sir Walter Lawrence, still happily with us, earned the affection of the Maharaja by constant advice and sympathetic understanding. Sir Charles Bayley, Political Agent, was his official guardian before Sir Brian Egerton's time, and His Highness holds his memory in affection and regard. Sir Arthur Martindale, Col. Trevor, Col. C. K. M. Walter, and Sir James Dunlop Smith were among the others whose official connexion with the Maharaja during his younger days helped to shape his character and to teach him the lessons of political wisdom. They were undoubtedly no ordinary men and equally it was no ordinary Prince they had to educate and train up to his responsibilities.

## NOTE

By SIR BRIAN EGERTON, K.C.I.E.

It was on a May morning of 1895 that, on return from leave in England, I rode up the hill to Mt. Abu and was met and warmly greeted by His Highness Ganga Singh, the fourteen-year-old Maharaja of Bikaner, whose tutor and guardian I had been appointed.

Then began a friendship which His Highness has honoured me with till the present day.

His Highness had been educated at the Mayo College, but had left in 1894 and had been under the Tutorship of Pandit Ram Chandra Dube, whose conscientious care of the

Maharaja's interests and of his studies was deserving of the highest praise. The quite surprising facility with which His Highness spoke English at this early age was no doubt greatly due to his having associated freely with the children of Mr. (later Sir Charles) Bayley, who had been Resident at Bikaner till shortly before I joined the Maharaja.

I had been warned that His Highness was regarded as a timid rider and a somewhat indifferent sportsman by his brother Princes. I found him eagerly desirous of playing polo, shooting big game, and of taking part in all sporting events, and it was only owing to his never having been suitably mounted that he had not hitherto shown that keenness on riding that he developed in a very short time.

At that time the minor Ruling Princes of Jodhpur, Kotah, and Alwar were all at Mt. Abu for the season, and His Highness joined in all the hospitable entertainments and festivities that the presence of so many Princes gave rise to—and himself gave several very popular entertainments at Bikaner House.

On returning to Bikaner in July His Highness lived in the Fort, where accommodation was also found for me, and it was there that serious study was resumed.

While His Highness was assiduous in his studies, his activity was amazing. Riding and shooting before breakfast and study morning and afternoon, polo in the evening, and at a later date roller skating to finish up with, was an ordinary day's routine varied on holidays by a ride out eighteen miles to Gajner, shooting and pig-sticking there, and riding back in time for polo in the afternoon.

Study at this time was more or less on the usual educational lines, but frequent visits to various places in the districts, close touch with the affairs of his State, and with his troops, interviews granted to nobles and landowners, together with the punctual performance of all religious and State ceremonies, must all be regarded as part of His Highness's training at this period.

In January 1896 an educational tour in Upper India was decided on and His Highness, Maharaj Bhavum Singh, the Pandit Ram Chandra Dube and myself, and two of His Highness's companions visited Lahore, Delhi, Agra, Amritsar,

Cawnpore, Lucknow, Calcutta, Darjeeling, and on the way back Benares. The monotony of sightseeing was varied by some excellent shooting on the Borganga, and at Benares, where His Highness the Maharaja of Benares had arranged a shooting camp.

At Calcutta a tremendous reception was accorded His Highness by the Marwari community, and His Highness was also entertained by His Excellency the Viceroy. He also played polo on the Maidan on ponies lent him by a friend.

During the next three years His Highness's training developed on rather more advanced lines including a thorough study of every department of State, attendance with the Resident at meetings of the Council, tours to practically all parts of the State, and practical demonstrations of survey and revenue work, &c.

Visits to Deoli, where His Highness shot his first tiger, Bundi, Kotah, Alwar, and Pertabgarh were all features of these years of training, as was also the annual visit in May and June to Mt. Abu, where His Highness's polo team played in tournaments and many friendly matches with marked success, and where the hospitality of Bikaner House was extended alike to princes, Government officials, and visitors who were friends of the Maharaja.

It was on the 16th of December 1898 that His Excellency the Viceroy invested His Highness with full powers of State, and it was a few weeks after that I took my leave of Bikaner.

During the few years of my tutorship I had seen His Highness develop into a tall young man, of striking appearance, a brilliant polo player, a marvellous shot, a keen pig-sticker (too keen at times as a broken collar-bone brought home to him), and a perfect host.

He had been most assiduous in his studies—passionately devoted to his State and its interests, he had been all along determined to master every detail of its administration, and the introduction of a canal into his territory was already a fixed object of his ideals. How, after twenty-five years' battling, water was at last brought to the State is a matter of history. Equally an object of his early imagination was the opening up of his State by means of railways, whilst his choice of the site

and approval of the initial plans had resulted in the erection of the wonderful Palace of Lallgarh.

Loyalty to his friends and to the Throne was a very marked characteristic of his early years as it is to-day.

I would venture to add a word of appreciation of the wonderful wisdom of Her late Highness the mother of the Maharaja, who never allowed her affection for her son to stand in the way of his manly development or of giving her support to any well-devised scheme for his good.



## Chapter Three

### AT THE HELM

WITH the recognition of the British Government, communicated by the Agent to the Governor-General through a formal *kharīṭa* from the Viceroy, the Maharaja assumed full powers of government on the 16th of December 1898. Eleven years he had reigned and the administration had been carried on by the Regency Council in his name. But from the 16th of December 1898 he was to exercise at his own discretion the sovereign powers of the ruler of Bikaner. There was, indeed, no legal change; the Maharaja's coming into his own was merely the assumption of authority which had always belonged to him. But undoubtedly it was, as history was to show, the end of an epoch and the beginning of another in Bikaner.

The Government of India have always considered it necessary that the assumption of powers by a minor Ruler on the attainment of his majority should be marked by ceremonials which would indicate that the Ruler is being invested with powers by the Crown's representative and that the occasion marks both a legal and political change. A grand durbar was therefore held in the old fort at which Sir Arthur Martindale, the Agent to the Governor-General, who was the bearer of the formal *kharīṭa* of the Viceroy investing the Ruler with powers, was assigned the leading role. In the presence of the Chiefs and Nobles of the State, and the members of the Regency Council, the Agent to the Governor-General read the *kharīṭa* of the Viceroy and proceeded on his own part to advise the young Ruler on the duties of his exalted position. The young Maharaja thanked the representative of the Viceroy for his words of advice and expressed his gratitude to the Council of Regency

which had carried on the onerous duties of administration during his minority. He paid a special tribute to his tutors and guardians who had charge of his education. All this was according to routine and did not differ in any way from the normal procedure at the assumption of powers in any other State or of any other ruler. But Maharaja Ganga Singhji showed on the same day that while polite formalities were necessary, more imperative was the call of duty, and that the assumption of powers was not merely nominal but real in the sense that he intended to be the effective Ruler of the State from that very day. At a separate *darbar* of the chiefs and nobles he spoke out his mind regarding the administration of the State and the factions and intrigues which were rampant in the capital.

‘I want you to understand’, said the Maharajah, ‘that I am saying what I really mean in this speech and not what I have been told by other people to say.

‘The first thing (and that is a very important one) that I want to say to-day is something about the past. You will know that a minority of 11½ years is a very long time and unfortunately, if the people have no strong hand over them to keep them going on the right way, they are apt to go wrong and quarrel with each other and form silly intriguing parties. I am sorry to find that this has also been the case in Bikaner.

‘When I returned from the Mayo College, Ajmer, in 1894 I found two parties going on in Bikaner, known as the Sodhi Hukm Singh’s<sup>1</sup> party and the party against it. You don’t require to be told anything about this. You all know everything of this. These parties I am sorry to say have been the ruin of Bikaner in a way. Everything good comes by working together, while dividing into parties, and trying to do each other harm, is the ruin of the State. Since I came from Mayo College I always wished that these parties would break and the departure of Sodhi Hukm Singh made a great difference, but unfortunately a little of that party feeling still exists. What I want very much now is that these party feelings should *stop* at once.

<sup>1</sup> Dewan and Vice-president of the Regency Council.

‘The loyalty which you have showed during my minority is worthy of you. It is not such *bari bat*, to show your loyalty when a Chief is grown up. It is your duty (*dharma*) to be loyal, but to show loyalty when a Chief is a little boy and the majority of the people are against him is indeed a great thing and you have done so and I want to assure you I shall always bear that in mind.

‘I want you to understand that whatever I shall do in the future, I shall do it because I think that that is the right and just thing to do, not by favour. In doing justice you must not expect me to show favour to any one. I shall have many sirdars and officials who will be in personal attendance every day, but you must not think that because they are with me that what they ‘*arṣ karo* me will naturally carry weight. It will be no use to you to send messages through them, and those who bring and send messages to me will incur my greatest displeasure. Nor is it any use your ‘*arṣ karāono* through the zenana sirdars. What you want to say come and say it to me direct and you will always have my best attention, and I will do my best. By coming straight you will save yourselves and me a useless waste of time and trouble. I hope this will also put a stop to bribery, because now you know that the people with me cannot use their influence one way or other and it is your own fault if you will give bribes. I wish it to be known that I strongly disapprove of bribery and mean to put a stop to this. God help the men who give and take bribes because I certainly will not.

‘Sirdars, let it be known to the ryot through you that there is to be no bribe taking or bribe giving in future. If the ryots think they are illtreated tell them to come to me but tell them not to waste their hard-earned income by giving it as bribe to any of the Raj servants be he great or small.’

This was indeed a strange utterance from a young Ruler who was but eighteen years old. It was the voice of one born to rule, who took his responsibilities seriously and who was going to spare neither himself nor his officers in the work of administering the State. The Maharaja had watched and waited since his return from college and had

noted with concern the dangers in to which an administration without an active head falls by slow degrees. He had decided from the beginning that whatever happened, the bad old days of intrigue, faction, and corruption should not return so long as he was the Maharaja of Bikaner. And the Maharaja made it clear that he was not merely echoing the pious sentiments put into his mouth by some one else, but was giving expression to his own genuine feelings.

The occasion was of interest in another way. The custom was prevalent in most States by which recommendations in matters of administration reached the Ruler through the ladies of the palace. The wives of the nobles and other sirdars have free access to the inner apartments, and it was never considered wrong to secure the good offices of the ladies of the palace to further the interests of their husbands and relations. The Maharaja's mother told her son on the day of his assumption of powers that he should make a public announcement that she greatly disapproved of this procedure and should under no conditions be approached for recommendations to her son. Such a high sense of duty on the part of his mother pleased the Maharaja greatly and he warned the sirdars that any attempt to approach his mother against her expressed wishes would meet with stern disapproval from him.

A young prince assuming his powers at the end of a long minority is always the object of great hopes and expectations not unmingled with anxiety. The people of the State, tired of an administration without a visible head, await with hope the day when their hereditary ruler, in their vision a Prince Charming, takes personal charge of the affairs of the State. The tutors, guardians, and other officials on the staff of the Maharaja wait and watch with solicitude to see how the young man whom they have long trained will rise to his opportunities. The Government of India set him on his tasks with many words of advice and

with many expressions of goodwill; but their eyes and ears are strained to see and hear how the young Ruler is going about his business of kingship, and their Agents, always on the alert, are especially required to watch with interest the doings of the new Ruler. The young Ruler finds himself thrust suddenly on to a stage where he is the principal actor and on which the limelight falls mercilessly. He finds himself watched on all sides, some with approving nods, others waiting to trip him up: sycophants and flatterers ready to lead him astray, and chiefs and nobles looking for a weakness in order to strengthen their own powers. It is a nervous and difficult time for a young Ruler, especially if he is imbued with ideas of progress and reform.

The position when the Maharaja took over the administration was, from the point of view of the States, one of extreme difficulty. Over a period of forty years the position of Indian States, *vis-à-vis* the British authority, had become steadily worse. From sovereign princes and States in alliance with the Crown, they had by slow degrees become 'chiefs' 'under the suzerainty' of Britain. They were held to be 'feudatories'. Their sovereign character was denied. Subtle changes were introduced into the phraseology and political officers were confidentially instructed to avoid the use of words which might suggest the sovereignty of princes. Words like allegiance, wardship, &c., borrowed from feudal theory, crept into official documents, and it was openly asserted in authoritative quarters that the relationship of the States with the Crown was feudal and that by the assumption of Imperial title by the British Sovereign a mystic transformation had taken place in the position of the Indian rulers. Pretensions to the inheritance of Moghul claims, which Lord Hartington had derided in Parliament as putting on the decayed mantle of the Great Moghul, were vaguely put forward. In fact from 1880 onwards the prestige and authority of the Indian

rulers had greatly decreased, as a result of encroachment based on practice and the logical elaboration of a political theory based on feudalism which had authority neither in the facts of the political situation nor in the history of the relationship of the States with the Crown.

That theory reached its climax in the time of Lord Curzon, who succeeded Lord Elgin as Viceroy in 1899. The vague and undefined ideas which had so far found expression only in unofficial pronouncements were clothed by him in the form of magisterial declarations. The Indian rulers had no powers of their own. The Crown had merely permitted them by grace to exercise certain powers, or as he himself expressed it: 'The sovereignty of the Crown is everywhere unchallenged; it has itself laid down the limitations of its own prerogative.'<sup>1</sup> This meant in theory a repudiation of any rights based on treaties or agreements. The Crown had merely laid down certain limitations on its own prerogatives which it was entitled to modify or rescind. It naturally followed from such a claim that the princes were not sovereign. Based on this idea the Foreign Department (as it then was) worked out in detail a scheme of prohibitions. The rulers were not to call their sons princes; they were not supposed to reign but only to rule: they did not ascend 'thrones' but only acceded to 'gadis'; their troops were not armies but only 'forces', their governments were not to be styled as such but only as 'darbars'. Lord Curzon even objected to the colour of the liveries. The minuteness with which Lord Curzon's Government worked out these details and the persistence with which it applied them show clearly the culmination of the policy of slowly putting the princes in their proper place.

Great irritation had been caused by this policy among the princes of India. While many of them were too weak to protest effectively against such encroachments, a few

<sup>1</sup> *Lord Curzon in India*, p. 227.

like the Maharaja Gaekwar voiced the discontent of the princes and pointed out that the changes introduced and thus given effect to were not in consonance with the position of the princes. One extraordinary result of the claims put forward by Lord Curzon was the aggrandizement of the position of the residents and political agents at the courts of Indian rulers. They began to claim in relation to the State a higher authority than that of the ruler. They pretended in fact to be the virtual rulers invested with the right of supervision, direction and veto and asserting authority to interfere in any matter they liked.

It was at such a time that Maharaja Ganga Singhji assumed his powers. Shortly before that the Resident intimated to His Highness certain confidential conditions which the Government of India expected him to follow during the next few years :

19th Nov. 1898.

My dear Maharajah,

I am directed to inform you that the Government of India have decided that Your Highness may now be entrusted with the management of your State, subject to certain limitations to be imposed for a time at least.

These limitations are :—

- (i) That no measures or acts taken or done by the Council of Regency during the minority may be altered or revised without the concurrence of the Political Officer accredited to the State.
- (ii) That the Political Officer's approval must be obtained before any important change is introduced in the administration.
- (iii) That His Highness the Maharajah will not act against the Political Officer's advice in any important matter.

I am to ask you to send me a formal acceptance in writing of these limitations. I am sure you will recognize the consideration which has been shown in framing them.

Yours sincerely,

H. A. Vincent.

These vexatious restrictions, it may be added, were formally removed 'unconditionally' only in 1907, though the Maharaja had been given to understand originally that they were imposed 'for a period of two years or so'.

Such confidential restrictions on young rulers at the time of their assumption of power are not unusual. Their purpose is said to be to ensure that there is no unnecessary dislocation of the administrative machinery through violent innovations by an inexperienced ruler. While it is desirable no doubt that young princes with unlimited authority and no experience should be properly guided in the first years of their administration, it is open to question whether the system of laying down confidential restrictions is the best method of doing it. It only tends to irritate young and sensitive rulers and to place them in a false position with their own subjects. They start their young lives with a feeling of frustration. Nor was the case different with Maharaja Ganga Singhji. The unpleasantness of the first few years of the Maharaja's effective reign may be detected in many of His Highness's speeches, even in later years. Nor could it be said that the political officer accredited to his court at the time was fitted by temperament to administer these restrictions with the minimum of irritation to the ruler.

The Maharaja himself did not regard his position as a bed of roses. A new ideal that was slowly developing among a few of the younger generation of princes that a ruler's duty is to play polo, shoot game, entertain guests, and leave others to look after the administration had no appeal for him. He knew that the proud heritage of Rao Bikaji which had descended to him was not for one whose ideal was that of having an easy time. The State of Bikaner with its area of 23,000 square miles, with its complex interests, conditions, and problems, its isolated position, its scanty and precarious rainfall, its restless populace and its proud and untamed aristocracy, required constant



vigilance and unceasing activity. His State was not rich. Compared with the other great States in Rajputana, its peers in rank, its income was inconsiderable. Though its mineral wealth was great, it was undeveloped; though much of its area was fertile, there was neither adequate rainfall nor irrigation to enable the ryots to cultivate the land. The vast area over which he ruled was unconnected with the capital except by primitive methods of transport. To a young Maharaja, active, enthusiastic, and with visions of future greatness for his country, there was little time for ease or for pleasure. Nor, indeed, was the Maharaja even given a chance of taking his duties lightly.

A great calamity which befell India generally, and with it the Bikaner State, helped His Highness to devote himself whole-heartedly to the service of his people. Eight months after the Maharaja assumed full powers, the whole of northern India fell into the grips of a great famine. Famines were never wholly unknown in India. As crops are dependent on the timely fall of rains, a failure of the monsoon in any particular year is certain to cause untold misery through shortage of food. The British Indian Government had as a result of bitter experience formulated various schemes to mitigate the effects of such unforeseen calamities. But Indian States generally had not followed in the wake of British India, mainly because railways had not yet opened up their States, and public works and other schemes of employment cannot easily be resorted to when land revenue, on which the State administrations depend, itself is not forthcoming.

Between 1848 and 1899 Bikaner had been afflicted by no less than seven famines; but in the absence of railways and other methods of quick communication no organized relief work seems to have been undertaken by the State at least till the time of the Regency Council. During the administration of the Council, Bikaner suffered from two famines, one in 1891-2 and the other in 1896-7. The famine of 1892

was confined to a few *tehsils* and was met by prompt measures taken under the orders of Mr. C. S. Bayley, who was then Political Agent at Bikaner. The famine of 1896-7 was much more widespread and extended practically to the whole of the State. The Regency Council did their best to carry on relief operations on the lines laid down in the Government of India's abstract Famine Code for Indian States. Large suspensions of revenue were made in the afflicted areas, temporary advances were given to cultivators, and relief operations of approved kind which cost the State over three lakhs were started in important centres. But the loss in human life and cattle was great and the resources of the State had been severely crippled by this calamity.

The famine of 1896-7 was, however, only a prelude. The authorities were still rejoicing in having successfully fought the calamity of 1896-7 when the news began to spread that the monsoon had completely failed in other parts of India. The *bajra* and *moth*, the two staple food commodities of the State, are dependent on an average rainfall of 12 inches spread over August and September. The average rainfall of 1898, when the State was supposed to be recovering from famine, was only 6 inches. Well might it be said that scarcity was the rule rather than the exception in Bikaner. The monsoon of 1899 opened favourably with good showers in the third week of June, but when the crucial month of July passed without a single drop of rain, it was clear that Bikaner was fated to suffer another famine more disastrous than all that had afflicted it previously.

The State was in no way prepared for the calamity. In fact it had not recovered fully from the ravages of the famine of 1896-7. The grain stores were altogether depleted. The vitality of the people and their material assets had been very considerably reduced. The supply of water and fodder was altogether deficient. In fact, the Regency

Council had left the State dangerously unprepared for even an ordinary lean year.

Even in normal circumstances, famine administration is not an easy matter. The Government of India itself had decided on a settled policy only after the disastrous experience of the great famine of 1878, when a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the whole question. The Famine Code, which prescribes the methods of combating this scourge, was the outcome of that inquiry. It is obvious that to fight a great calamity affecting an entire population, left without food and water, comprehensive measures involving the utilization of all the energies of the State are necessary. Such measures could not be left to individual energy and initiative but must be part of a concerted plan, based on experience, on local conditions, and on an understanding of the entire situation. While the Government of India had, at least after their experience of 1880, a well-defined plan of action, based on the Famine Code, with a complete machinery ready to be put into operation at short notice, Bikaner had neither a programme nor even any scheme based on the realization that a crisis might arise. The Regency Council, after their experience of 1896-7, had supinely remarked that 'should the Railway work be finished before the next period of scarcity, there would be nothing to do but to collect the starving at selected points of the railway line and feed them on grain brought up by train'. This was all the programme and all the machinery left by the Regency to His Highness to fight this unprecedented scourge.

It became clear by the middle of August that the monsoon had totally failed. The parched desert yielded no crops. Cattle and other live stock began to die in large numbers through extraordinary heat, lack of fodder, and scarcity of water. The misery of the villagers was so great that emigration began to take place on a large scale towards the Punjab, Malwa, and other areas.

The Ruler who had to face this calamity of unexampled magnitude was only a stripling of eighteen; but His Highness rose magnificently to the occasion. On the 23rd of August test works were opened at Gajner, and from that date the Maharaja devoted himself day and night to the creation of an effective organization to fight the famine. A famine committee was appointed which, under his direction, managed various branches of relief and the provision of labour for famine-stricken people. The main question of organization which the Maharaja had to face was the transportation of grain from the railway to the different camps. It must be remembered that there was only a railway line of 87 miles in the whole State and hardly any roads worth the name outside the capital. To supply the grain to the different camps from the stations was no easy matter, and it was obvious that the revenue authorities could not undertake so serious a work of organization. The Maharaja took the bold step of substituting the army for the ordinary revenue machinery in this work. With such efficient organization as the military was able to provide this work of transporting grain was carried out with success.

A detailed programme of works and relief measures was drawn up with care. The works decided upon were both useful and remunerative and of permanent benefit to the State. The most important work that was undertaken was the extension of the city wall of Bikaner. As in other old Indian cities, the area within the city wall had become greatly congested. Better sanitation and improved health conditions were impossible so long as the space within the city was limited. The enlargement of the city area was therefore a very essential preliminary undertaking for any improvement of the capital. The north-western portion of the city wall was in consequence extended, enclosing 740,000 square yards of land within the city. The cost of this operation was Rs. 84,200 for skilled labour and

Rs. 85,731 for feeding famine labourers. As against this expenditure of Rs. 1,70,000 the State was able by the sale of land enclosed to realize practically the entire sum within the next few years and over Rs. 5,00,000 up to 1930.

As distress became general, a Famine Relief Department was constituted directly under the Maharaja. Without restrictions of caste or creed relief was extended to all who applied for it. The number steadily rose till March 1900, and not till after the long-expected rains had broken by the end of July that year was there any lightening of strain from this enormous work on the Maharaja and his State.

To add to the misery, disease also began to play havoc. The months of July, August, and September had passed without the appearance of epidemics. But the low vitality of the people, already the victims of successive famines, had left little resistance in the poorer classes to fight disease. Dysentery and cholera began to take a heavy toll, and small-pox and measles prevailed in the camps. The Maharaja, who had himself been a victim of a mild attack of cholera, spared no pains to make adequate medical arrangements in the camps, both in the city and in the districts. Qualified doctors were placed in charge of camps and compounders were sent round to the villages twice a day to attend to the needs of the people. Strict supervision was enforced over the water-supply of the city and wells were effectively protected.

It was not sufficient to issue orders from the capital. No one knew better than the Maharaja that the misery was greatest in the villages. He felt that it was necessary to undertake a tour of his dominions and personally inspect these operations. This was, however, not an easy thing to do. In the absence of railways and motor roads, tours of inspection are not matters of comfort. But the Maharaja was undaunted. Accompanied by a very small staff, he toured the State on horse and camel with only three small

tents for the accommodation of himself and his staff. Such energy and interest in the work of administration in the case especially of a young Maharaja of eighteen was indeed unusual.

In spite of all these effective measures, the loss in life and live stock was very great. Nearly three-fourths of the entire cattle of the State died owing to scarcity of fodder and of drinking-water. Large numbers died of starvation and disease, and whole villages emigrated to the neighbouring districts of the Punjab in the hope of better conditions. The aftermath of famine brought therefore its own problems of administration. The cultivators had to replace the cattle they had lost, and money both for cultivation and for the purchase of live stock had to be advanced to them. The population which had emigrated to the Punjab and other neighbouring areas had to be persuaded to come back, and revenue demands had to be spread in such a way as not to fall too heavily on the already impoverished cultivator.

The Maharaja's work in this connexion and the success which attended it attracted a great deal of attention. Col. Dunlop Smith, the Famine Commissioner of Rajputana, in his report to the Government of India declared:

'The famine campaign would never have turned out the complete success it did, had it not been for the personal interest taken in its prosecution by the Maharaja. He took the initiative at the beginning and was the guiding spirit of the relief operations. . . . The energy and shrewd capacity he brought to bear on the conduct of affairs made his famine administration in some respects a pattern not only to other States but to British districts.'

The Government of India, in reviewing the famine administration, expressed their admiration of the work done by the Maharaja. Sir Denzil Ibbetson, Revenue Member of the Supreme Government, declared as follows in the course of a speech in the Imperial Legislative

Council: 'The personal attention which His Highness the Maharaja of Gwalior and His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner have paid to the organization of relief in their respective States is not only highly creditable to themselves as rulers but has also contributed largely to the success which has attended the famine organization.' The Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal, that coveted decoration for humanitarian work, was given by the Queen Empress in recognition of the Maharaja's personal activity, and Lord Curzon paid a glowing tribute to the Maharaja who, in his words, was 'his own famine officer throughout that fearful time and conducted his campaign with indefatigable energy and skill'. The young Maharaja had won his spurs.

The experience gained by the Maharaja in famine administration was utilized by him to draw up a well-considered, systematic, and useful programme of Famine Relief for the future, which could be put into operation whenever occasion arose. Detailed rules were drawn up and great care was taken to keep in store sufficient supplies of tools and implements necessary for starting famine relief operations at short notice. It also had the advantage of bringing the young ruler into much closer contact with the administration than many years of routine work at the council table would have enabled him to do. He gained first-hand experience of administrative problems under conditions which deeply moved not only his humane feelings but directly touched his responsibility as a ruler. He toured extensively in the State not in circumstances when everything was arranged to please the ruler but under conditions which brought home to him the distress of his people and the precariousness of their lives. It was not cheering crowds that met him with buntings and decorations in their houses and villages. Nor were his lightning tours by forced marches and hardly any attendants undertaken to impress his personality on the people or to carry on a few routine inspections. It was the long-drawn faces of

a famine-stricken people ravaged by disease and starvation that welcomed Maharaja Ganga Singhji on his early tours, and, indeed, the impression that these unforgettable experiences made on him has been one of the great motive forces of the Maharaja's reign.

'Never again, if human enterprise and skill can prevent it' was the unspoken decision that the Maharaja took in his own mind. He knew the conditions in his own State; the long stretches of desert sand unconnected by roads, rail, or any modern methods of communication; parched with unslaked thirst of centuries, dependent on a small and precarious rainfall, the cultivators with fatalistic resignation waiting on the vagaries of an uncertain monsoon. With true instinct the Maharaja realized as a result of his famine experience that the future of Bikaner lay in a twofold policy—railway development and irrigation. A systematic development of railways which would connect every part of the State with the capital and with British India by fast lines of communication and would make famine conditions impossible by bringing the granaries of India to the doors of the villagers was a first necessity. Irrigation which would free the cultivators from the vagaries of the monsoon and would ensure a steady supply of water to the ryots was equally imperative. But alas, there is no river flowing through Bikaner. Irrigation, if it was to materialize, had to come from sources outside the State, and it is by no means easy in India for a non-riparian State to share in the advantages of a natural water-supply. If irrigation had to wait for the favour of other parties, railways at least could be developed without the same difficulties. And to this end the Maharaja began to devote attention.

The Maharaja was not inclined to rest content with the notable success he had achieved, and an opportunity soon presented itself for him to gain personal distinction in the service of the Crown. The intervention of the great Powers in China, following the attack on the Legations,



necessitated the dispatch of an Indian expeditionary force to Peking. For a Prince with the traditions of imperial service dating from the time of the Moghuls this was a unique opportunity. The Maharaja offered himself for personal service at the front and Lord Curzon accepted the offer with enthusiasm. The first Indian prince to go overseas to fight under the British flag, the Maharaja sailed immediately from Calcutta and arrived in Tientsin in command of his Camel Corps, which he took as a dismounted unit and was mentioned in dispatches. It was no small thing for a Prince who was hardly twenty and who had been invested with full powers only a year and a half before to have volunteered and gone to a distant land in the service of the Empire. On his return the Maharaja was given a fitting public reception. To Lord Curzon, who was anxious to reorganize the Imperial Service Troops and to bring the rulers of Indian States into close co-operation with the defence of India, the Maharaja's action appealed very strongly, and he very rightly decided to show honour to the Prince who had rendered such active personal service. The reception at the quay was therefore with full ceremonial, and the Foreign Secretary, the representative of the Viceroy, and high military and civil officers in uniform were there to do him honour.

Shortly afterwards the Maharaja was informed verbally that Lord Curzon had obtained King Edward's consent for inviting him as a representative of the Princes to attend the Coronation in London which had been fixed for the 26th June 1902. The Maharaja accepted the invitation and left Bombay attended by a small staff, on the 31st of May.

During the Maharaja's stay in London he was the guest of His Majesty's Government, who had not only taken a suitable house for his residence and engaged the necessary complement of servants, carriages, &c., but also had

attached to him an officer to look after his convenience and to pilot him through the strange ways of London Society. The officer chosen for this delicate duty was Colonel (afterwards General Sir Herbert) Vaughan Cox, whose social flair and knowledge of the world were of considerable help to His Highness on making his first bow in the Court Circle of the Empire.

The Maharaja was received everywhere in London with unusual distinction. His handsome person and distinguished manners made him a welcome guest everywhere. All who came into contact with him were impressed by his bearing and the seriousness with which he approached every question. This was also his first contact with the Royal Family which was in time to develop into great consideration and friendship on the one side and devoted loyalty and attachment on the other. Their Majesties King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra showed him many marks of favour and in all functions he was invited to stand behind His Majesty along with members of the Royal Family.

A personal honour which the Maharaja valued very greatly which came to him from this visit to England was his appointment as honorary Aide-de-Camp to the Prince of Wales, later King George V. That honour the Maharaja highly appreciated, and when in the fullness of time the Prince ascended the throne of his ancestors, the Maharaja was continued as A.D.C. to His Imperial Majesty—a position which he held till the lamented demise of King George V in 1936. His personal service to the late King was therefore the longest of all such honours, extending to thirty-four years, and it is an open secret that between them there was established a bond of friendship which was greatly cherished by the Maharaja and appreciated by His Majesty.

To the Maharaja this visit to England was a great experience. It enabled him to see the machinery of the

Empire at close quarters and to appreciate the great qualities of the British people. Above all, he recognized how much remained to be done in India and in his own State to bring it to the level of efficiency and organization which he was privileged to witness.

The foreign travel of Indian rulers has been the subject of a great deal of criticism which in many cases has been undeserved. There is little to be said in support of a ruler who neglects his duty to the State and his people and prefers to spend his time and the money of the treasury in watering-places and in centres of social attraction. During his thirty-nine years of effective rule the Maharaja has had occasion to visit Europe many times, but all his visits save two have been in connexion with official work. But even when, as on the first occasion, the Maharaja's visit was purely official and as the guest of the Government, he did not fail to observe and make mental note of the varied and beneficent activities of British life: the efficiency of its administration, the great and varied amenities of civic life, the suitable combination of hard work and relaxation. His own keen interest in the embellishment of the capital, in the provision of broad avenues, parks, and other features of European cities may clearly be traced to the effects which this early visit to Europe had on him.

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## *Chapter Four*

### THE FIRST REFORMS

ON his return from the Coronation of King Edward VII, the Maharaja took in hand the urgent question of the reorganization of the administrative system of the State. He had given the system inherited from the Council of Regency a fair trial, but it had proved totally unsuited to the altered conditions. The only change that had been introduced on his assumption of powers was the creation of the post of a dewan or chief minister. The Regency Council was converted into the State Council and continued to function as before. The members of the Council exercised the same powers over their departments as they had done during the minority and the Council office was kept separate from the Maharaja's office. Naturally these arrangements led to confusion, and were in no way suited to efficient and expeditious disposal of business.

From the very first days it was clear to the Maharaja that a modern State could not be created through an antiquated system of administration and that the first necessity, if he desired to take the governance of the State seriously in hand, was the creation of an efficient secretariat, under proper control. The system which the Maharaja had inherited from the Regency was cumbersome and inefficient. He had merely taken over the place which the Political Agent as President of the Council had occupied and was in direct charge of the administration of some departments. In a note written in his own hand, the Maharaja analysed the defects of the system. Coming from so young a Ruler—he was less than twenty-two—the analysis shows remarkable penetration and early political wisdom.

‘There is nothing laid down as to the limit of powers which each Member or the Dewan can exercise over the departments under their control. The result is that sometimes most important things are decided and settled by officers above mentioned, whereas some trifling things are sometimes referred to the full Council or to me. In fact, owing to there being no rules everything is done in a haphazard way. There is also a general tendency to shirk responsibility as much as possible and for everybody to try and have a finger in the pie whenever they have a good opportunity. The result is unsatisfactory and injurious to the interests of the State while much extra work is thrown on my shoulders.’

Though the Maharaja had not yet developed the effective style he has to-day, it is clear that he already possessed shrewd political insight. The great difficulty of the system was that by making the Maharaja responsible for departmental administration, he was deprived of the time necessary for effective control of the State administration. He wrote ‘The present system is very discouraging to me and the interest I naturally feel in the State would be increased a hundredfold if I knew that I had at last attained my object of getting—what I consider essential—a sound system introduced and I was responsible for the good and bad results’. It failed to keep the Maharaja in close touch with the administrative machinery, to acquaint him with the working of the system, and to enable him to guide and control the administration in a really efficient and satisfactory manner.

In fact the system was admirably suited for a ruler who desired to remain the nominal head of the administration. It vested effective power in the Dewan and kept the Maharaja active in unimportant departmental routine. Devised for a ruler whose interference in matters of policy might have led to an administrative break-down, it was clearly unsuited to one who not only desired to

take the initiative into his own hands but was satisfied with nothing short of effective control over the State.

A scheme of secretariat reform was conceived and elaborated by the Maharaja personally with a view to three definite objects. The Maharaja desired to free himself from departmental administration in order to enable him to get the necessary time to work out important questions of policy which he was maturing in his own mind. Secondly he desired to establish a properly co-ordinated secretariat where the secretaries working directly with him and under his control would have definite powers. Thirdly the secretariat was to be so constituted as not merely to become a central clearing office of business but an effective instrument for the initiation and execution of the durbar's policies. The essence of the scheme was that the secretaries should individually work directly under the supervision of the Ruler, who, divested of his departmental administration, would be in a position to control the entire government of the State. There is no denying that this was a system of direct personal government. In the then circumstances of the Bikaner State such a change was inevitable. The Government of India held the Ruler responsible for the good or bad administration of the State, and the constant refrain in the Maharaja's own writings at the time was that if he were to be held responsible, he should be in a position to control and direct what he was responsible for.

A scheme was cautiously adumbrated. The separation between the Maharaja's personal office and the Council office, which had led to much duplication and inconvenience, was abolished and the *Mahkma Khas* was constituted as the central secretariat. The different departments of Government were grouped into five portfolios and each portfolio was entrusted to a secretary who worked directly under the Ruler. The post of the Dewan or Prime Minister was abolished. In another Note on

the new scheme the Maharaja cryptically remarks: 'I think it is unnecessary to go into the argument which can be raised against having a dewan, but it is well known that such an appointment has often led to trouble,' between the ruler and his minister. The Maharaja could have given numerous instances of dewans who, in their anxiety to secure the good opinion of the British Government, had not hesitated to be more the agents of the political officer than the servants of the ruler. Especially in the case of a young and inexperienced ruler, the dewans had a natural tendency to pose as mentors and to assume authority which properly belonged to the ruler. The history of Indian States from Travancore to Kashmir teems with instances of rulers whose powers had been overshadowed and whose authority had been set at naught by disloyal dewans working under the orders of the political agent. Naturally at his age, the Maharaja, looking forward to great reforms and improvements under his own direct initiative and control, fought shy of prime ministers. In course of time when his own authority became undisputed and his personal position was above the intrigues by ministers or political officers, the Maharaja was able to overcome his prejudice against dewans and prime ministers, and gladly revived the appointment.

The abolition of the dewan's post had also the result of giving more initiative to the secretaries. There was no authority interposed between them and the Ruler, and the secretaries, knowing the Maharaja's mind and the general direction of his policy, were made responsible for the elaboration and execution of detailed schemes.

The scheme in itself was modest. It involved no radical change and was meant to further efficiency and expeditious disposal of business. The people of the State received it with approval as it showed to them that their Maharaja intended to take keen and direct interest

in the administration. And yet the Political Agent at Bikaner was not inclined to look upon it with favour. He detected in it signs of a reforming and innovating mind, and in his opinion reform and innovation, if they were to come at all, should come from him. He showed his displeasure that the Maharaja should have changed the system 'which had worked well during the minority' in so short a time after his accession to power. He expressed himself very candidly with regard to some of the proposals. Though some of his criticisms related only to the details, the main objection he raised was to the abolition of the post of dewan. He also realized that the direct control of the secretaries without the intervention of a dewan was the pivotal point of the scheme. When the Maharaja firmly but politely refused to have either a dewan or a chief secretary the Political Agent wrote:

'I do not myself agree with you in the matter, I must admit. I think you will change your views if you would only look on a chief secretary as a help to you and not as a rival authority and a check on you.'

On the details and personnel also there was a great deal of correspondence. The Political Agent was not quite prepared to trust the Ruler's selection of his secretaries: he declared that one of the secretaries would have too much work and the other would have too little, and a third was not perhaps suitable. The Maharaja was patient. Each point raised by the Political Agent he answered in detail in notes in his own hand. It was his first serious difference with the Political Agent, the first experience of that well-meaning disposition on the part of local officers to interfere in details which blights all initiative in Indian rulers. He knew that he had to go slow and that, while holding to his own point of view, he should not alienate the Political Agent. He was polite and persuasive, but he answered note for note, and in this warfare of



words the Political Agent, unaccustomed to Rulers who write their own *aide memoire* and who were prepared to argue and convince and not merely to sulk in an attitude of injured dignity, found himself worsted.

The Agent at last agreed to the Maharaja's proposals, and the sanction of the Government for the new scheme was received in due course. But the Maharaja knew that his display of initiative and firmness was not likely to be overlooked. Curious as it might seem, the proposals which were so stoutly opposed by the representative of the Government of India were in essence the same that the Government of India at a later time recommended to young rulers coming of age as the most suitable for introduction into their States. It may be that it was not the reforms that the Political Agent objected to, but that the Maharaja and not he himself was responsible for their conception and initiation, which induced him to take up an unfriendly attitude.

In a great Durbar held in the presence of the Political Officer and the chiefs and nobles of the State, the Maharaja announced his scheme. In a short speech he showed the difficulties he had experienced under the old system and the necessity for modifying it; he explained how carefully he had gone into the matter himself and devised the new system through which he hoped to improve the administration and give the State the benefits of a modern government. After explaining the details of the scheme the Maharaja exhorted his hearers to give him whole-hearted and loyal co-operation.

Thus the new system came into being. If it met with veiled opposition from the Political Agent, it was accepted with mild scepticism by the non-Bikaneri officers, who thought that the youthful enthusiasm of the Maharaja would soon lose its momentum and the scheme would become another of the many paper devices to improve efficiency, which rulers and administrators of

India were accustomed to promulgate from time to time. The first Cabinet consisted of Maharaj Bhairun Singhji (now Colonel Maharaj Sri Bhairun Singhji Bahudur, K.C.S.I.), Secretary in charge of the Foreign and Political Department; Thakur Raghubar Singh, Revenue and Financial Secretary; Raja Hari Singhji of Mahajan, Public Works and Railway Secretary; Mr. Rustomji Cooper, Secretary for the Medical and Jails Department; Kanwar Prithwi Raj Singh, Secretary for the Military Department. The Police and Educational Departments were under an Under-Secretary, but after a short time these departments were amalgamated with the Medical and Jail Secretariat under a Home Secretary. Thus substantially the present system of administration came into existence as early as 1902.

The establishment of the new administrative system was the first visible indication that the Maharaja was not content merely to carry on but was intent on creating a modern state and an efficient system of government in place of what he had inherited. Glorious as the traditions of the Bikaner State were, and proud as the Maharaja was of the achievements of his ancestors, it was clear to him that if Bikaner was to maintain its pride of place among Indian States, it must accommodate itself to changing conditions and must within a short time be converted from a medieval administration into a modern State. The Secretariat was only the first step, the necessary equipment for sustained endeavour. Sceptics as well as admirers watched with interest the working of the new system.

A comprehensive policy was set before the Cabinet. If Bikaner were to be transformed into a modern State it was clearly necessary (1) that the legal system should be remodelled and the State supplied with the essential juridical legislation on British Indian lines; (2) that the land should be properly settled and an equitable system

of taxation established; (3) that proper medical and educational agencies should be created to promote the welfare of the people; (4) that an efficient police force should be raised which would give protection to the people and ensure tranquillity in the State; (5) above all, it was necessary that the vast area of the State should be opened up by railways and roads and the material resources of the State very considerably increased by the exploitation of minerals, by the extension of cultivation, and by the establishment of suitable industries.

For the success of so comprehensive a scheme two things were essential: a strong and efficient executive establishment to carry out the policies and sufficient finance to enable schemes to be taken in hand. The Maharaja was greatly handicapped in both respects. The district administration was inefficient owing to lack of control and the finances of the State were not capable of bearing the burden of great undertakings. When the Maharaja took over the administration the revenue was less than Rs. 20 lakhs. But he was not the man to be overwhelmed by these difficulties. Cautiously the schemes which His Highness had in mind were taken in hand. Every year began to show increased mileage of railways bringing increased revenues to the State. While in 1898-99 railway income was but Rs. 1,60,000, in 1904-5 it had jumped to over Rs. 5 lakhs. But the Maharaja realized that administrative reform must first be carried out before other great schemes could be undertaken.

The Administrative Reports from 1903-4, the first year after the new Secretariat reforms, show that the Cabinet shared His Highness's enthusiasm in this matter and helped the Ruler whole-heartedly in it. The matters finally disposed of by the Cabinet in 1904-5 are thus enumerated in the Report for that year:

1. Reorganization of the Police Department.
2. Redistribution of revenue circles.

3. Issue of a confidential manual on the procedure at State ceremonials.
4. Measures tending to help the return of Bikaner cultivators who had emigrated during the famine.
5. Some measures for improving the condition of the ryot.
6. Improving and increasing the *rabi* cultivation in those portions of the State which were well suited for it.
7. Measures for encouraging cotton cultivation in the State.

The report further gives a list of matters which had come up for discussion during the year but the examination of which could not be completed in time. They include:

1. Irrigation projects.
2. A new railway project for opening up the eastern portion of the State.
3. A scheme and rules for the regular and periodical inspection by responsible officers of district and *tehsil* offices, police stations, district schools, customs offices, &c.
4. A scheme for compressing and storing hay and fodder.
5. Improving camel and horse breeding.
6. Revision of travelling allowance, leave, and pension rules, &c.

It will be seen on examination that the main activity of His Highness and the administration was concentrated on three things.

- (a) The strengthening of the executive machinery of the State, e.g. police, revenue department, touring and inspection, &c.
- (b) Improvement of the condition of the cultivator, by introduction of new crops, better methods of cultivation, &c., and
- (c) The opening up of the country.

It was the unforgettable experience of famine administration that provided the driving force for much of this work. That early calamity stamped on the Maharaja's mind two keywords: railways and irrigation. He realized that without a well-planned system of railways traversing the entire State and knitting up the vast area of Bikaner into one whole and opening it up for economic development, there could be no future for his State. Besides, railways were also a source of profitable investment. They brought a sufficient return on capital, provided employment for a large number of people, and made famine or relief work much easier. But railways, however necessary, could not convert the arid desert into fertile lands. Irrigation alone could do that. Unfortunately Bikaner has no river of its own. Nor was any extensive scheme of well irrigation possible. But the Maharaja was convinced, as his predecessor had been, that the future of Bikaner lay in irrigation. He dreamed of deserts converted into gardens, of waste land reclaimed to cultivation, of cattle and sheep roaming in areas where scorching sun had till then made animal life impossible. How this dream came true is the romance of the Maharaja's life and is dealt with in some detail in a later chapter.

It was not to be expected that great schemes of administrative reform strengthening the machinery of the State and transforming a medieval administration into a modern organization, enforcing its authority and exacting obedience in the most inaccessible parts of the State, could be put through without some opposition from those whose power and influence were threatened by these measures. The chiefs and nobles of Bikaner had on the whole been generally loyal to their Ruler, but during the break-down of administration in the early years of the last century they had become turbulent and often troublesome to the central authority. Some had taken to harbouring thieves; others to pillage of their

neighbours; and most of them carried on private feuds among themselves. As there was no police administration worth speaking of in the districts, some of them set at naught the authority of the State and became tyrants exacting in some cases unlawful imposts on the peaceful population and encroaching on the lands of the State. In the time of Maharaja Dungar Singhji the nobles, finding their position threatened, had, as mentioned before, risen in open rebellion. Maharaja Dungar Singhji's life was greatly embittered by this unfortunate action, for British intervention which resulted naturally led to an unseen but not unfelt limitation of the Maharaja's powers. The rebels were dealt with, under British advice, very leniently. The nobles who had borne arms against their own sovereign were given punishments which might have proclaimed the clemency of the Maharaja, but which every one in the State knew to have been the result of the Resident's advice, and were recognized to be inadequate as a deterrent. In fact the nobles gained very considerable advantages as a result of this rebellion. Only one estate had suffered a nominal diminution, and those nobles who had been deposed had the satisfaction of seeing their own sons or heirs placed in possession. These lessons were not lost on the nobles. They knew that if another agitation could be created which would compel the Government of India to intervene, they would secure additional advantages and perhaps see the Maharaja's powers effectively curtailed. The discontented spirits among them were again ready for a trial of strength.

Maharaja Ganga Singhji's own policy towards the nobles was never in doubt. The interest he took in their welfare was indicated by the establishment of the Walter Nobles' School. That School, though established during the minority, was really due to the Maharaja's own initiative. He realized that in a Rajput State like Bikaner, built

up by the co-operative effort of the ruler and his nobles, and in which the leading nobles were connected by blood with the reigning House, the maintenance of the proper authority and dignity of the aristocracy was an essential part of political wisdom. The Maharaja recognized early that, if properly educated and trained to modern ideas, the nobles could give as much service to the State in these peaceful times as their ancestors did in the field of war. To him they were the pillars of his throne. In no other matter was he more anxious than that of inculcating in the chiefs and nobles of the State the necessity of public service in the spirit of *noblesse oblige*. He was always anxious to safeguard their just rights and to maintain and preserve undiminished their dignities and privileges. But the chiefs and nobles, long accustomed to defy the authority of the State in their desert castles, could not all be brought to realize that times had changed and their claims to uncontrolled authority could no longer be tolerated. They watched the Maharaja's efforts to strengthen the executive authority of the State with resentment and suspicion. A vague realization came to them that the modern State which the Maharaja was trying to create would exercise equal and unquestioned power from one end of the State to the other, and that any unauthorized usurpations would soon be challenged by a State which not only claimed but was in a position to enforce its all-pervading authority. The more truculent among them felt that unless this tendency was nipped in the bud their position would soon be endangered. It was known to them that the Political Agent had not wholly approved of the Maharaja's scheme of reforms and was doubtful of its virtues. The scheme which some of the nobles conceived was that if a movement on a large scale were organized and sufficient complaints put forward against the Maharaja a situation similar to that which developed in 1883-4 could be staged, and the nobles might gain

civil and criminal powers within their estates and make themselves petty rajas practically independent of the State. The leaders in this agitation which soon developed into a conspiracy were Thakur Bhairun Singhji of Ajitpura, Thakur Hukam Singhji of Bidasar, and Thakur Ram Singhji of Gopalpura. The Thakur of Ajitpura was not new to the ways of disloyalty and rebellion. He had as a young man of twenty-one joined in the rebellion of 1883-4 but had been let off with a small fine owing to his youth. The Regency Council had found him a recalcitrant chief, and there were serious complaints from the British police authorities in Hissar that he was harbouring dacoits and was in the habit of extorting money from people. The Political Agent himself had been forced, as President of the Regency Council, to ask him to furnish security for good conduct. The Thakur of Bidasar was an equally disloyal chief. His father had been deposed for taking a leading part in the rebellion of 1883-4. Since Hukam Singhji came of age he had been engaged in disloyal activities and had attempted to usurp within his own estate the right of levying certain taxes which had been prohibited by the State. Thakur Ram Singhji of Gopalpura, whose ancestors had always been loyal, was perhaps a more unsatisfactory character. He was not above replenishing his own empty coffers by entering into partnership with dacoits and robbers, and the Resident at Jodhpur officially communicated with the State that this Thakur was suspected of having been associated with an important case of mail robbery.

These robber barons, finding that the Maharaja was not likely to tolerate their misdeeds, began spreading disaffection by the usual methods of exaggeration and misrepresentation. In July 1904 they thought, as a result of the differences between the Political Agent and the Maharaja, that the time was ripe for concerted action. A well-organized seditious movement was set on foot. The



rumour was spread that if only sufficient strength could be shown the Political Agent would intervene and the Durbar's authority over them would consequently be weakened. Secret agents went from place to place, promising favour, threatening vengeance, pleading for unity. The movement gained strength and secured the adherence of a number of influential nobles. The Maharaja and the administration were wholly in the dark. So cleverly was this organization and propaganda spread that except for vague rumours no information reached the Government. Not satisfied with an agitation confined entirely to the nobles the conspirators attempted through agents to bring in the rich merchants and bankers of the capital and even to tamper with the army. Approaches were made also to the spiritual leader of the Mussalmans.

During the Dusserah festival, on which date falls also His Highness's birthday, all the nobles are, by custom, summoned to Bikaner for the great annual durbar. It is then that they present their *nazars* and renew their homage and allegiance to the Ruler. For the Dusserah celebrations the nobles collected as usual in the capital, but their temper was found to be different. There were great goings and comings in the homes of some of the sirdars and subversive meetings were being held in the houses of the ringleaders without even any attempt at secrecy. Information of this state of affairs soon reached the Maharaja, who awoke to the seriousness of the situation which threatened him. Still he was loath to act without giving an opportunity to the nobles to withdraw quietly from the movement. He took the occasion of the birthday banquet at which all the sirdars were present to warn them against disloyal activities and promised consideration of any genuine grievances which they had. This warning was sufficient for the majority of the sirdars for they had been intimidated by the more turbulent ones into joining the movement. Many of them quietly left

for their villages after apologies and assurances of loyalty. But the ringleaders had gone too far to withdraw. Heedless of the Maharaja's warning they continued to hold their meetings with a view to decide on a definite course of action. From the 24th to the 29th of October they met in secret every day in spite of friendly warning. Then the Maharaja decided on prompt and stern action. On the 29th an order was promulgated authorizing a summary inquiry into the activities of these sirdars. Getting wind of this unexpected and decisive action, the sirdars were at a loss to know how to proceed. They knew that the prompt action of the Maharaja had ruined whatever prospects of success they had; but they were hardened men, resourceful in intrigue. They drew up a list of 36 complaints and on the 31st of October, that is two days after the inquiry was ordered, they posted identical petitions addressed to the Maharaja, giving voice to their complaints in detail. These so-called complaints did not, it is interesting to note, contain a single question which had been taken up during the time of the Maharaja's own administration. Most of them had been settled long before the Maharaja assumed powers; some of them related to the decisions of the Council of Regency and the Political Agent. Only one question—that of stone quarries—had remained unsettled. But drowning men will catch at a straw and these sirdars, having nothing else to lay at the door of His Highness, tried to justify their seditious activities against him by drawing up complaints which had been satisfactorily met long ago. Before this petition reached the Maharaja, the preliminary inquiry had been completed. It disclosed a much wider and more serious conspiracy than the Maharaja had apprehended, and it made him realize that if prompt action was not taken there might be an armed disturbance of the peace, interruption in the administration, and loss of prestige and authority to the State.

The Maharaja lost no time in deciding on his course of action. He ordered the constitution of a special tribunal consisting of Maharaj Bhairun Singhji, the Secretary in the Foreign and Political Department and a member of the ruling family, two of the principal sirdars of the State, the Raja of Mahajan the premier feudatory chief, and the Rao of Bhukarka, one of the four principal nobles, and two State officials, to try the thakurs of Ajitpura, Bidasar, and Gopalpura. The tribunal sat for one month and twenty-three days and the accused were given every facility for defence.

The Commission, after the most careful inquiry, unanimously found that

‘the pattedars of Ajitpura, Bidasar, and Gopalpura were dissatisfied with the State and took it into their heads to create a serious disturbance by making other sirdars and subjects hostile to the State by whatever means possible. It appears that they found no other method of converting the people to their views and hence apparently such things were hit upon as would appear at first sight to be useful to the other sirdars also, such as the acquisition of civil, criminal, and revenue powers. . . . The Commission has no hesitation in saying that the charge of sedition (124 A) is clearly proved against the sirdars.’

During all this time, Major Stratton, the Political Agent, had been kept fully informed of all developments. The rebels had set great store on his reputed tendencies towards intervention, but from the first, Major Stratton fully supported the action of the Maharaja. The Political Agent realized the seriousness of the situation, and far from giving encouragement to the nobles, helped His Highness with advice and supported him in taking decisive action. As soon as the Commission reported, the Maharaja summoned a durbar (on the 2nd of January 1905) to which he invited Major Stratton. No reason had been given for the convocation of this extraordinary durbar and there was some speculation as to the decisions the

Maharaja would announce on this occasion. The Maharaja addressed the assembled sirdars and officials and explained the entire position created by the conspiracy and the action he had so far taken. He assured the other sirdars that the State wished to deal with them fairly and justly and had no desire to treat them in any but the most honourable manner. 'At the same time,' the Maharaja added, 'it is a *sine qua non* that they too should in return remain absolutely loyal to the State, myself, and their jagirs. The State exercises sovereign powers over them and they must live as sirdars and subjects of the State.' This announcement left no doubt as to the Maharaja's policy. He was prepared to maintain the just rights of the Nobles and uphold their high dignity, but the State must come first. They must cast off all false notions of living in isolated independence, as states within the State, and must as loyal subjects be prepared to co-operate with the Ruler and his administration. There was going to be no toleration of defiance, no licence of feudal tyranny.

The Report of the Commission was then read out to the Assembly. Its comprehensive nature and its careful analysis of evidence made a deep impression. It left no doubt as to the seriousness of the crime committed by these sirdars. They stood convicted of the charge of sedition and disloyalty. Further, they had also clearly infringed the conditions on which their estates were held. In the ordinary course of law they would have suffered long terms of imprisonment and forfeited their estates. But the Maharaja, while desiring to give a stern warning to others, was not moved by any spirit of vengeance, and decided to temper firmness with clemency. So in consultation with the members of his Council, he decided on administrative punishment, confiscating only one-half of the estate of the Thakur of Ajitpura and a village each from the estates of Bidasar and Gopalpura. Bidasar was also degraded a step in precedence in the durbar. Un-

doubtedly this policy of clemency was wise. The Maharaja's own desire was to establish cordial and harmonious co-operation with his nobles, utilizing their tradition of service, their talent, and their leadership for the great work which lay before him. Any action which would have rankled in the mind of the chiefs would jeopardize the success of this policy. What was important was not that full penalty should be exacted, but that the supremacy of the State should be established beyond doubt and the prestige of the Maharaja's administration vindicated. The Maharaja was wisely satisfied with this.

But the offending nobles did not appreciate the mildness of the sentence. They appealed to the Government of India. Major Stratton, the Political Agent, who was fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, had disappointed the nobles' expectations and staunchly stood by the State. Sir Arthur Martindale, the Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana, was inclined to be a little more critical. He felt it his duty to inquire fully into the complaints, to ask for the evidence produced for the prosecution and for the defence, and to inquire into the previous history of each of the conspirators. But on a full examination of the entire case he was also satisfied with the wisdom and moderation of the Maharaja's action. Though the Ruler, the Political Agent in his State, and the Agent to the Governor-General were all alike united on the necessity of the punishments meted out, the Foreign Secretariat in far-off Calcutta took a different point of view. A memorial had been sent up through the Political Agent by the three sirdars concerned on the 18th of February 1905, and though Sir Arthur Martindale, who himself had carefully examined the evidence, again supported the action of the Maharaja, the Government of India issued a communication on the 7th of September attempting to modify the Maharaja's decisions. The appeal of the sirdars was formally re-

jected but His Highness was confidentially advised that the punishment awarded had been disproportionate to the offence committed by the nobles, and was required to reduce and revise the sentences. The Foreign Department letter took the view that 'the degree of culpability attaching to the action taken must be measured by the extent to which their grievances were well or ill founded'. It was recognized that they had formed a combination to represent the matters to the Government of India. 'The Government of India', the letter added, 'are unwilling to lend colour to the idea that they are prepared to recognize as an offence in itself the preferment of the complaints by the subjects of a Native State to the Governor-General in Council.' In fact the Foreign Department held inferentially that the thakurs were justified at least partially in their action, as they found their semi-independence threatened and the State had greatly exaggerated the seriousness of the position. They saw in the action of the thakurs nothing more than a formal protest by the nobles against the reforming activities of the Ruler, and they were of the opinion that however wrong the thakurs were in the action they took, it was extenuated, if not justified, by the consideration that a conservative body like the hereditary nobles of a State was not likely to take far-reaching reforms with mild complacency.

It was indeed a period of trial and trouble for the Maharaja. If the advice of the Government of India were enforced, his prestige with his people would have been greatly reduced and all the disaffected elements would have been proportionately elated. The nobles, successful in opposition, would have resisted him at every turn and his cherished ambition of making Bikaner a great modern State would have vanished into thin air. Naturally he bent all his energies towards a satisfactory settlement. He had already taken the precaution of securing a promise from the Viceroy that in the event of

the Government of India being disposed to interfere with the orders passed by the State, the Maharaja would be heard in advance. He therefore went up to Lord Curzon and placed the whole facts before him.

The Maharaja had no difficulty in proving that the tentative advice of the Foreign Department was based on wrong premisses: that the question involved was not the right of petitioning the Government of India or of combining to do so; that the sirdars' activities were for the purpose of creating disaffection among all classes of people with a view to getting the administration into difficulty. In the note that the Maharaja wrote to Lord Curzon it was clearly pointed out that the object of the conspiracy was to 'bring about a state of affairs in which every man would be a "raja" in his own house, to obtain for the thakurs civil, criminal, and revenue powers, which they never had: in short to excite disaffection against the State, to effect which end references were made to the events of the rebellion in 1883-4 by way of encouragement and example . . . .' After a detailed examination of all the aspects of the conspiracy, the Maharaja concluded by saying that if in a matter on which the Ruler, his Council, the Political Agent, and the Agent to the Governor-General concurred, the Government of India did not uphold his authority instead of modifying his orders, a situation would be created which would render effective government impossible. The Maharaja, in fact, took so strong a view of the question that he made it plain to Lord Curzon that he would sooner abdicate than suffer such a humiliation.

It must be said to the credit of Lord Curzon that where he considered his Secretariat was wrong, no false sense of prestige was allowed to stand in the way of doing what was just. The Maharaja's arguments carried the day and Lord Curzon overruled his Foreign Secretary and upheld the Maharaja's decision. The decision of the Governor-

General in Council as communicated to the Maharaja by the Political Agent on the 7th of December 1905, stated that Lord Curzon was willing to support the authority of His Highness.

The thakurs were fully aware of the nature of the original orders passed by the Government. They were still under the impression that the Government of India would support them if they continued in their resistance, and the Thakur Bidasar refused to surrender the confiscated village. The Maharaja had to order his troops to march into the fort of Momasar, held by one of the rebel chiefs, and take forcible possession. The whole incident was an undoubted victory for His Highness. All things considered, this was perhaps the most momentous decision taken in regard to Bikaner in the lifetime of the Maharaja. It is impossible to conceive what results an adverse decision would have had. It would have put Bikaner back to the middle ages, from which, through the activity of the Maharaja, it was fast emerging. It would have discouraged the Ruler in his reforms, and embittered his zealous and ardent spirit. The nobles would have defied the State and set themselves up as semi-independent potentates and tenaciously opposed—encouraged by the success of their conspiracy—every change. Above all, the petty intervention of the Political Department would have also been continuous. This diplomatic success, against the views of the Foreign Secretary himself, demonstrated clearly that Maharaja Ganga Singhji intended not only to reign but also to rule, and that while he would welcome advice and listen to suggestions he was determined by all honourable methods to resist encroachments on his authority.

Within the short period of six years the Maharaja had achieved much. In the birthday honours of 1904 the Maharaja had been made a Knight Commander of the Star of India. The Agent to the Governor-General, Sir



Arthur Martindale, in presenting His Highness with the insignia very rightly drew attention to the remarkable achievements of the young Ruler in so short a time.

‘You were invested’, he said, ‘with ruling powers at an exceptionally early age in 1898. In the short six years, which have since elapsed, you have been awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind decoration of the 1st class for the excellence of your famine arrangements; you were created a Knight of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire for your services in the China Campaign in 1900; you were one of the two Chiefs selected to represent this great Province of Rajasthan in England at the Coronation of His Majesty the King-Emperor; you have received commission as a Major in a distinguished regiment in His Majesty’s Army; you have been appointed Aide-de-Camp to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales; and it is now my privilege to deliver to you the Insignia of a Knight Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India in token of the recognition by the Government of the services rendered by your troops, whom you wished to lead in person in the deserts of Somaliland, and of their approval of your administration of your State.

‘So long and so remarkable a series of honours and distinctions achieved in so short a time is probably unprecedented. I offer Your Highness the cordial congratulations not only of myself, but of your many friends, both those who are here at this Durbar, and those who have not the good fortune to be present. I derive unmixed gratification from the fact that the close personal friendship which has existed between Your Highness and myself since the day when I had the honour to represent His Excellency the Viceroy at your Investiture with ruling powers should have prompted your wish to receive this decoration from my hands before my approaching departure from India. And I feel assured that this fresh proof of the approbation and confidence of His Majesty’s Government in India will only serve to stimulate Your Highness to persevere on the path which you have hitherto followed, and thus to earn still further, and, if possible, even more distinguished marks of their satisfaction in the years to come.’

This noble record was not achieved without much trouble and serious handicaps. As indicated above, the relations between the Political Agent and the Ruler, though personally cordial at all times, were not politically friendly during much of the time. It should be remembered that it was the period when the policy of minute interference in the affairs of Indian Rulers had reached its height. The accepted creed of the Political Department under Lord Curzon was that the interests of the State demanded that the Ruler's initiative should be curbed and his actions even in minor details subjected to the inquisitorial scrutiny of the political officers. There were no doubt many officers who were content to give friendly advice and sympathetic encouragement to rulers who were conscientiously trying to do their best for their States. But Captain Bayley, who was Political Agent in the State soon after the Maharaja assumed powers, was not one of them. Nothing was too small for his scrutiny. Nor was he loath to encourage the belief that the real power in the State lay with him and not in the Ruler. Petty employees dismissed in the ordinary course of events for corruption or inefficiency, professional malcontents, disloyal nobles and others, knew that however unreasonable their case, they could get a hearing with the Political Agent. A few examples will show how far this system was carried. A police jamadar of Chhatargarh had been convicted by the Appeal Court. The man himself had not appealed to the Council or to the Maharaja, who was the highest judicial authority, but had sent a petition to the Political Agent. Captain Bayley was not satisfied with sending the petition to the Government, but asked His Highness that the file might be sent to him. He made a habit of calling for 'reports' from the Maharaja in trivial matters on the basis of petitions from mischievous people of the lowest class. The Maharaja naturally felt humiliated, but as Captain Bayley was one towards whom His Highness entertained

a genuine feeling of friendship, he tolerated it for a time. But the Political Agent's appetite for petty interference only increased with time, and the Maharaja felt called on to write to him a dignified protest, which is quoted below to show in what way this system of interference worked.

*Private.*

Bikaner, Rajputana.

The 18th December, 1899.

My dear Captain Bayley,

I am having the note about Mool Chand's case prepared and when ready will send it with the petition. Also the case of Lekh Ram.

No. I don't personally mind at all your asking about these people's cases when they petition you, as there is nothing to hide; but I must say it is quite new to me and I am not accustomed to it. Since I got my powers in December 1898 and till Colonel Vincent went away in August last I don't think there was a single case in which Colonel Vincent sent the man's petition to us for report. He sent them for disposal only. You can look this up in your office records. He hardly ever asked me about any case either. He often told me that he had confidence in me and did not want to hear anything about such cases and that he wanted to leave me alone. Of course I always consulted him in important matters. I am certain Colonel Vincent too must have had a lot of petitions complaining against me, but I know he never sent them to us. There are always heaps of low subordinates in the Police, etc., who are by no means good and honest and I have constant bother with them. I think I might be trusted to deal with them without doing any intentional injustice to them or interference. I don't know how far I am right, but I think that when a Chief has got full powers, he ought to be left alone and not interfered with in such small ordinary cases. I don't mean to say you have at all interfered with any of my cases etc. You have asked for the file of late Jamadar Lekh Ram. You said he hadn't appealed to me or the Council and wanted to see the file of the Appeal Court. If the man had any wrong done to him, he has still got the two highest Courts in the State to ask for redress. If you now saw the file (not that I am not going to send it to

you, but I am only going through it myself first) and made suggestions, of course they would have to be followed; but if you had left his case to us to see we would have done it equally justly. I hope you won't get offended at my expressing myself so freely but in private with Colonel Vincent I made a point (which I think is very straightforward) of always telling him what I thought even though I disagreed with him. Unless you ask me not to do so, I will follow the same principle with you.

My whole meaning is this—that the low class of servants in this State—the majority of them at any rate—are the very worst type you can find anywhere and if on getting petitions from any of them you always asked for notes, etc., it would of course be an awful bother. Hardly a day goes past when I don't hear of some Police (or other Department) villainy or other and if you ask on each case, the people who petition do get to know of it through your clerks or mine and it puts their backs up and even if you don't interfere it, in a way, upsets my authority. I mean they know I can't do anything very much myself without your asking an explanation. That's the gist of my whole letter.

Colonel Vincent himself was very particular about this and he never allowed anything I had done to be discussed even in the most casual manner before him by any one, any where. I know this for a fact.

I have written all this to you more as to a friend than to a Political Agent and I hope you will agree that I did right in telling you what I had in my mind instead of keeping it there.

Excuse scratches but I am seedy. Can't re-copy.

P.S. So far you have been petitioned mostly by outsiders. There are lots of Bikaneris who are also discontented and they too, if they find out anything like this, will begin.

Captain Bayley was not to be put off. His view was that he and not the Maharaja was responsible for the good government of the State, and that the Political Officer who did not interfere in the manner he did was not earning his pay. His letter in reply to the Maharaja's

protest is a classical example of the attitude of the Political Department at the time.

'I have read your letter written yesterday evening about petitions, and I must say I am rather surprised, though of course I am very glad that you should express yourself freely and say what you think. I am sorry however to find that you so absolutely misunderstand my action in asking about these petitions and that you also appear to misunderstand the position of a Political Agent generally towards his Durbar. Nothing is further from my mind than interference with your orders and I trust that there will never be any greater need than there is now for even contemplating such interference. It is however the duty of every Political Agent to satisfy himself that the State with which he is, is well and justly governed, or how it is governed, and he can only do this by occasionally asking for reports on selected petitions. I consider (I may say that as this is the fourth Agency I have held and I have also seen a lot of work in the Agent to the Governor-General's Office and the Foreign Office, I am not without experience) that a Political Agent who merely forwards every petition he gets to the Durbar for disposal, and never tries to find out what the facts are, is not doing his work and earning his pay. Colonel Vincent may have done this, but then his long experience of Bikaner may have justified him in taking everything on trust. I have not that experience. . . . I should of course not think of allowing your orders to be discussed before me, but asking for information on cases of which I am ignorant is a different thing, and the reason why in two cases I asked you for information direct is that you appeared not to like my doing so through mine and the Dewan's Office. In Lekh Ram's case I asked you for the file as the most convenient way of getting at the case and as causing you least trouble. I am not in the least keen on seeing the file if you would sooner not show it to me and a note on the case would do just as well. As for my making suggestions I should of course not dream of doing such a thing at the present stage.

'If I disregard all petitions, the only result will be that petitioners will go up to the Agent to the Governor-General and on

to the Government of India, and the Political Agent here will be asked officially to report on their grievances, which will of course involve his calling for reports from the Durbar.

‘It is, I assure you, no uncommon thing to call for information in respect of complaints from subjects of Native States, from the biggest Durbars in India and where Chiefs have held their powers for years. When I was in the Foreign Office, I have seen and signed plenty of letters asking Agents to the Governor-General and Residents to procure such reports. Asking for reports officially must of course be known to the office clerks, but even if they tell the petitioners no great harm is done. The petitioners very soon learn that no action is ever taken by the Political Officers in their cases, unless they have really been treated with flagrant injustice. Here of course there is no question of injustice at all, as I fully recognize that your endeavours are all aimed at ruling justly and well, and that if you are occasionally severe it is because you consider the lower class of State servants to be mostly “the worst type you can find anywhere” (a somewhat sweeping opinion I may observe, and one which you will I trust find reason to modify in years to come). Moreover, I have been trying my best to avoid even letting the office know that information on cases is being asked for, by applying to you direct. All my office know is that I am keeping such and such a file in my room, and there is no need for your office to know that information has been asked for by me unless you tell them. It is a simple matter for you to ask for such information for yourself and then let me have it. I say all this because I wish you to understand that I have been trying to act with special consideration for your wishes. If a Political Agent had been sent here with no previous experience of Bikaner and who had not had the advantage of knowing you, or of hearing about you from Colonel Vincent and Mr. Martindale personally, he might and probably would, have asked for reports officially on many petitions, whereas I have only taken notice of three. I hope I have said enough to show you that your complaints about my proceedings are not quite fair, but if you wish to be further convinced I shall only be too glad to refer the whole matter to Mr. Martindale and obtain his opinion. You must remember that though I

have the pleasure of being your personal friend, I am also your Political Agent and as such have duties to perform, of which I and my superior officers are the only judges, and which cannot be neglected even though they unfortunately clash with your notions of what a Political Agent ought to do.'

This early experience of pettifogging interference was indeed galling to so proud a spirit as that of the Maharaja, who, conscious of his own staunch loyalty and of his conscientious efforts for his people, found it humiliating in the extreme. Not only was the Political Agent officious and meddling, but he was prepared to justify his action on a very wide interpretation of his functions. His explanation, as his own letter shows, was very simple. It was merely that this was his view of the functions entrusted to him by the Government of India. Clearly the Maharaja's conception of *his* duty to his people, and the Agent's conception of his own functions could not be reconciled. Much of the Maharaja's insistence in later years on the necessity of codifying political practice and of freeing the rulers from the worries which interfering political officers create, arose from his experience of these days. Naturally jealous of his *izzat* and of his sovereign rights over his own State, and conscious that he was doing what was right, the Maharaja could not brook the petty officiousness which was exemplified by these cases.

No one, least of all Maharaja Ganga Singhji, has ever denied that it is the right and duty of the British Government to interpose its authority and to intervene decisively in the affairs of a State where there is gross oppression or flagrant misgovernment. But it is a far cry from such legitimate intervention to petty interference in the daily administration of the States. In a speech delivered in the Chamber of Princes on this question twenty-five years later (1930), the Maharaja made his position clear.

'The principle, namely of contractual necessity—not any vague Imperial necessity—as the correct test of the occasion

for intervention, which we had urged was easily intelligible—could easily be understood by the Princes and their people as well as by the British Government. The Butler Committee failed to make the position at all definite and rested content with that confession of their inability when they remarked that paramountcy must ever remain paramount. It was a counsel of despair. But we are not without hopes that, even if our efforts during the proposed consultations are not entirely successful, we shall make some satisfactory advance on the present state of affairs; and if we can even lay down in what cases there should be no intervention, that will be something gained.

‘There are instances forthcoming—I fear, not rare—so far as the past is concerned, of interference even with the private, family and domestic affairs of rulers. Heirs-apparent of rulers have been placed in a position of even exercising veto and control over the action of their fathers, who have not abdicated but who have been unfortunate victims of circumstances and at times of panicky and hasty action; and thus the impossible has been attempted, viz., setting up two sovereigns in one State, just as it is impossible to put two swords in one scabbard.

‘It was a matter of frequent occurrence some 20 to 30 years ago, and I fear is not unknown even in recent times, when prime ministers and the other ministers of States have been supported by the political officers and encouraged to act against and insult their rulers.

‘Cases are not wanting—dating back not to antiquity—when political officers have interfered, or attempted to interfere, in support of rebellious or otherwise guilty nobles of our States, regardless of the inherent rights and susceptibilities of their sovereign rulers. Indeed, about the time when I came of age, a veteran Political Officer expounded to me the strange doctrine that his policy always was—be it noted that it was not the declared policy of the Paramount Power, but the personal policy of an individual political officer—invariably to support the State against the nobles during the periods of minorities and, similarly, invariably to support the nobles against their rulers immediately the minorities cease. This *obiter dictum*, regardless of the rights and wrongs, needs no further comment.

‘It has been within my experience soon after I came of age



to have been forced during my early days to dismiss proved and loyal men—who had served the State for a great many years, without the slightest inquiry or investigation or without the slightest opportunity being given to such loyal and deserving officials of any chance of repudiating the allegations made against them by intriguers in our States, or charges preferred against them by such political officers—because the Political Officer held the view that they were “mischievous” men and “did not mean well in the least”.

‘We have had official letters of enquiries addressed to me and to my Prime Minister asking for explanations and even for files on petitions submitted to the Resident at Bikaner regarding even police jamedars and constables against their dismissal by the departments concerned and such matters.

‘We have been asked similarly, on account of a petition to the Resident from the gardener at Gajner, to furnish explanation of what the case was about; and we have had a letter from the Political Officer who was in those days accredited to our State asking why the butcher, who was a Bikaner subject, but who supplied meat to the Residency, had been dealt with in some matter according to the law and recognized practice, usage and custom of the State. The explanation of my Government was actually demanded by the Resident in regard to the most heinous offence of our failing to supply a camel sowar required for the benefit of the domestic menials of the Residency; and ultimately, we were threatened by the statement that it was fortunate that the “explanation”—in effect of course a reply—sent by my Political Department had “arrived in time to render it unnecessary for” the political officer “to take any further steps in the matter”.

‘When, shortly after my coming of age, in 1902 I tried to inaugurate a system of administrative reform and to introduce almost the identical Secretariat system followed by the Government of India themselves, I first had great difficulty in getting the political officers, whom under the then conditions I had to consult, to agree to this scheme, which was a distinct improvement on the old system carried on during my minority—which worked very well and which is still in force; and for years afterwards, I was pestered with questions and asked to

“furnish reports” as to the manner in which the system was working—as if it were a totally strange and untried and dangerous administrative scheme to which we were resorting.

In 1904—when, like members of a criminal tribe, asking for leave of absence, Princes were required to ask permission before leaving their States—I was in indifferent health and I had proposed to proceed on a purely private and informal visit to Bombay for a change. But I actually received a letter from the Resident advising me to defer my visit for another ten days as the Agent to the Governor-General could not anticipate the orders of the Government of India twice asked for, and because the delay showed that there might be some difficulty. My health was not of course taken into account in the least. Later I was graciously informed that there was “no objection” to my proceeding to Bombay. In the meanwhile, I had however dared the political authorities to arrest me or stop me forcibly from going to Bombay, as of course I intended carrying out my original programme.

‘I trust that I am not digressing too much if I express the hope here that during Your Excellency’s Viceroyalty a change may be effected whereby questions relating to the princes and States, instead of being viewed from the standpoint of whether or not there was any “objection”, would be viewed with the single aim and object of meeting the reasonable demands of the princes and States, for safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests, and making the princes’ and States’ position more secure and more happy, and thereby enabling the States to make more marked and rapid progress all round and further strengthening the relations that exist between the Crown and the States, which have stood the test of the fiery ordeals of great wars and rebellions, and have proved that the princes and States are wholeheartedly inspired with the single object of being true to their treaties and obligations and worthy of the high position they are privileged to occupy as “perpetual Allies and Friends” of the Crown.’

While therefore fully alive to the responsibility of the Crown to prevent gross misgovernment, the Maharaja was in no way prepared to tolerate the daily naggings of

interfering political agents. From 1899 to 1905 there was clearly visible a strong undercurrent of this conflict. It was a conflict both of personality and of policy. That the matter never came to a real crisis was due to the tact, diplomacy, and personal charm of the Maharaja. But slowly the atmosphere changed. The Maharaja's record of administration showed that he was not only a far-sighted and conscientious Ruler but one who was prepared to stand up for his rights and the authority of his position. The complete success which the Maharaja gained in the conspiracy case demonstrated to the political officers that the policy of interference was no longer tenable and that with a Ruler like Maharaja Ganga Singhji, whose sole interest lay in the welfare of the State and whose activities were all directed towards that end, a policy of friendly advice rather than of indiscriminate meddling had the best chance of success.

It may be mentioned here that with the departure of Lord Curzon, the Government of India's own policy in the matter of interference in Indian States underwent a radical change. Lord Minto realized that the right policy to be followed towards the States was not to force the pace of their administrations, or to insist on the introduction of British methods of government, but wherever possible to encourage wise and benevolent rulers by supporting them in their authority and helping them in their troubles. In his famous Udaipur speech he gave expression to the new policy which he had put into effect since the beginning of his régime.

'I have always been opposed to anything like pressure on Durbars with a view to interposing British methods of administration. I have preferred that reforms should emanate from the rulers themselves, and grow up in harmony with the traditions of the State. It is not the only object to aim at, though the encouragement of it must be attractive to keen and able political officers. . . . My aim and object will be always to

assist them (political officers) but I would impress upon them that they are not only the mouth piece of Government and the custodians of Imperial policy but that I look to them to interpret the sentiments and aspirations of the Durbars. It is on the tactful fulfilment of their dual functions that the supreme Government and the chiefs must mutually rely. It is upon the harmonious co-operation of Indian Princes and political officers that so much depends—co-operation which must increase in value as communications develop and new ideas gain ground.’

The wisdom of this generous policy of goodwill and co-operation which was further strengthened by Lord Hardinge was amply justified by the increased trust and confidence which the princes began to show towards political officers. In Bikaner itself, after the first few years more or less synchronizing with Lord Curzon’s régime, the Maharaja and his administration were left free to carry on their own policy and to work out the future of Bikaner according to their own lights. But the change did not take place till the Maharaja had had a taste of what genuine interference meant.

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## Chapter Five

### ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

**F**REED from the trammels of petty interference the Maharaja was enabled to go forward with his well-planned scheme of reforms. He realized that the success of his work depended on infusing into his officers the spirit of enthusiasm and zeal which animated him. This was by no means an easy task. In Bikaner there was no organization like the Indian Civil Service imbued with a great and honourable tradition of administration. The higher ranks of the State service were manned mainly by non-Bikaneris. Even the natives of the soil, when in office, considered themselves the masters of the people, and were content and happy so long as they obeyed the orders of their superiors and carried on their routine duties. No great improvement in the government of the State was possible so long as the officials were not animated by a spirit of service. In order to bring about this very necessary change the Maharaja initiated a policy of annual administrative conferences. From 1903 one meeting of the Council was held annually under the presidency of the Maharaja, when the programme for the next year was discussed and settled. Till 1905 only the members of the State Council and the secretaries of the *Mahkma Khas* attended this meeting, but the Maharaja felt that better results would follow if all the important officials were taken into consultation. Thus was instituted the administrative conference to which, besides Members of Council and Secretaries, the district officers and the heads of departments were also invited.

Nor was the Maharaja satisfied with laying down policies. The years from 1903 to 1907 show intensive touring of the State by the Maharaja in order to see how

far the district administration was reacting to his policy. The general impression of the tours of Indian rulers is that they are huge and unwieldy processions involving great trouble to the local population through the use of compulsory labour and pack transport. They conjure up visions of an unending procession of animals carrying stores, baggage, and tents, of elephants, howdahs, arrangements for shikar, &c. The Maharaja's tours were of a different kind. The following description of the tour in the Sadar, Sujangarh, and Suratgarh districts in the winter of 1905, taken from the administration report of the year, will dispel all such notions of pomp and luxury.

'Leaving Bikaner on the morning of the 14th by train, His Highness arrived at Lunkaransar at mid-day and immediately left the station and inspected the *tehsil* and other institutions there. From there he rode to the next camp, Kanwalasar, 22 miles off, arriving there before dinner, and rode the remaining 28 miles into Sardarshahar the next morning. The afternoon of the 15th, and the 16th, were devoted to the usual inspections, and just before leaving Sardarshahar on the afternoon of the 16th His Highness collected the big *seths* and *sahukars* of Sardarshahar and, after sitting and discussing the matter with them for about three hours, had the satisfaction, before leaving Sardarshahar, of settling a long-pending social dispute among the Oswal community of the place. So pleased were they with His Highness's decision that both parties then and there signed an agreement binding themselves to abide by His Highness's decision. Thus came to an end a dispute of 9 or 10 years' standing between two factions of a numerous, rich, and influential body of local bankers, which had created much bad blood between them and brought all social functions to a standstill. The settlement of it was received with the utmost relief, not only by both parties, but by the inhabitants of Sardarshahar generally, who were all to a certain extent affected by it.

'Although settling this dispute delayed His Highness considerably, he was able to return to Kanwalasar late in the

evening of the 16th, and returned to Lunkaransar early next morning.

‘From there His Highness took train to Chautala Road, and early on the morning of the 18th marched to Rasuwala. From Rasuwala His Highness proceeded to Hanumangarh, and, after visiting Suratgarh *en route*, returned to Bikaner on the morning of 24th February. Hanumangarh and Suratgarh were this time again inspected and the usual work was done during the rest of the tour.’

One of the most difficult problems which faces an Indian ruler is the separation of his personal and privy purse expenditure from the public expenditure of the State. Many rulers have been inclined to look upon their States as their private properties, and to regard the revenues raised by the taxation of the people as personal funds on which the first charge was their own expenditure. Except in a few leading States, the very conception of public finance was unknown. The ruler claimed the right to draw without limit on the public treasury and to spend the money in ways which ministered to his pleasure and to his comforts. This, it may be said in passing, is totally opposed to the Hindu view of sovereignty. All the sacred texts, as well as treatises on political science, declare that it is the duty of the ruler to draw only a settled percentage of public revenue for his personal expenditure. And this was also the custom of most orthodox Indian rulers. With English education and with changing ideas of comfort and luxury and, it may be added, with new methods of spending money (e.g. racing, polo, &c.), the distinction between private and public finance was forgotten by many rulers. Maharaja Ganga Singhji from the beginning realized that finance was the basis of all sound modern administration, and decided as early as 1902 to separate the Privy Purse from the general budget of the State. The Maharaja’s personal expenditure, including private visits, shooting tours, cost of all private establishments, &c., was charged

to the Privy Purse, which was fixed at 5 per cent. of the ordinary State revenues. The Civil List establishment was separated and strict rules were laid down for expenditure under this item also. This early reform made it possible to establish a proper system of budget control and to enable the State finances to be developed on modern lines. The settlement made in 1902 worked very satisfactorily for over twenty years, and the question was not taken up by the Maharaja for reconsideration until 1924-5.

With the administrative machinery strengthened and the finances put on a sound basis, it was possible for the Maharaja to take up other important questions. The main problem that confronted His Highness was the necessity of providing the State with a modern system of laws. In this matter the Indian States stand in a special position. They have not in most cases to devise and draft new laws. The legislative activity of the Government of India, since Thomas Babington Macaulay was appointed Law Member, has been something extraordinary. Sir Henry Maine, Sir James FitzJames Stephen, Sir Courtney Ilbert, Lord Sinha, the Rt. Honourable Sir Tej Saprú, these are but some of the more outstanding men who have occupied the *gadi* of Macaulay, and in the result the many volumes of Indian Statutes constitute one of the most magnificent, if somewhat formidable, achievements of British rule in India. The great Indian codes, the Indian Penal Code, and the Civil Procedure Code, such necessary pieces of legislation as the Evidence, Company, and Registration Acts, are borrowed and promulgated with suitable modifications by the rulers as their own legislation. In many States British Indian laws are by a general order given effect *mutatis mutandis*. This system has certain very definite advantages. In the first place, it is clear that no Indian State can command the legal talent necessary for continuous drafting of elaborate codes, while the Government of India can draw upon the best that India and England can offer.



Secondly, the Indian statutes have been commented on, officially interpreted, and judicially decided upon, so that lawyers and judicial officers can follow the precedents of courts and know exactly what each section means. Thirdly, the State, while promulgating any law, can leave out, change, modify, or amend clauses which have either not worked satisfactorily in British India or which are unnecessary in the State.

When the Maharaja assumed the reins of power, the Bikaner State had been content to carry on with a few essential laws. The Maharaja, when he began to take up the question of reforming the judicial administration, discovered that, for the proper administration of justice, a *corpus* of substantive and adjectival laws was necessary. A period of intensive legislative activity followed. No less than seventy Acts were introduced in the quarter of a century between 1908 and 1931. While most of these were based on British Indian legislation, it should not be considered that they were either borrowed wholesale or introduced without detailed consideration and some very important modifications.

A thorough overhauling of the judicial system was then taken up. This was almost entirely the Maharaja's own personal work. There was some criticism that the attention of the Maharaja had all this time been devoted to the strengthening of the executive side of the administration and that little thought had been devoted to the judiciary. The Maharaja himself dealt with this point of view in his speech reviewing the administration of 1909-10.

'I have often heard it said that on account of the fact that I have been devoting my energies to reforming the executive side of the Administration and to reorganizing and improving the same, I have had no time to pay any attention to the judicial system in the State. It has, I believe, even been wondered at and commented upon that as yet nothing has been done in this direction.

'I should like to take this opportunity of clearly stating that neither of these views is correct, and I think I shall be able to show you that the real facts are quite different. In the first place, after I assumed the government of my State, and whilst I was considering the question of introducing reforms in the administration, the chief point that I had to pay attention to was, what part or parts of the State administration required the greatest and earliest attention. The answer to that clearly was the executive branch of the administration. It was, therefore, this pressing reform which was taken up to begin with. But it would be quite a fallacy to imagine—as I am going to explain to you—that the judicial side of the administration was not taken into account.

'The first thing we must remember is that the system of our judicial administration had then only comparatively recently been organized during my minority under the able guidance of Sir Charles Bayley, when he was Political Agent at Bikaner, and did not at the time stand in such immediate need of reform as the executive branch.

'Yet any system however carefully devised will, after all, require some modification sometime or other by the passage of time, in order to meet the changed circumstances and the growing needs of the public. These changes have from time to time been made during my reign, either in the form of circulars issued by the Durbar, or as the outcome of the discussions at the Administrative Conference, or by the conferment of additional powers upon different judicial officers, by raising the status of various *sub-tehsils* into *tehsils* and grouping and rearranging villages under various *tehsil* and *sub-tehsil* Courts for the convenience of the public.'

The details of the scheme of judicial reform, to which the Maharaja had devoted a great deal of thought, were announced by him in a public durbar of his nobles and officials. He was anxious to justify his proposals to the public and to emphasize the importance of the step taken in their interests. The judicial administration in Rajputana was, generally speaking, on medieval lines; in no State was there a Chief Court with full appellate powers.

In most the Ruler himself sat as the final Court of Appeal, and the boundaries between judicial and executive authorities were left conveniently undefined. The Maharaja was naturally proud of the reforms which he was initiating, especially as they were far in advance of the systems prevalent in the States of Rajputana. He was therefore anxious that other reforms in this connexion should be fully appreciated by his people. In his speech on this occasion the Maharaja drew attention to the different aspects of the scheme and said :

‘I have been engaged upon the present scheme and given it my most careful consideration for more than two years past and I have come to the conclusion that although the new proposals will be more costly—the annual expenditure being estimated at Rs. 32,000 on the Chief Court alone—it is the duty of the State to introduce the change forthwith in the interest of justice and of my subjects.

‘It is needless for me to dwell at any length upon the advantages resulting from the Chief Court for they are self-evident. You will now have a Chief Court sitting every day of the week to dispose of cases and to supervise and improve the working of the lower courts, and the Court will be presided over by fully qualified and trained judges. I earnestly hope that, whilst strictly upholding the dignity of the law and dispensing the most impartial justice, our Chief Court will not in course of time tend to become a soulless body dealing coldly and frigidly with human affairs, but I trust that the judges will combine with law and justice the sterling qualities of equity, sympathy, and good conscience, and also give due weight and consideration to the customs and usages and any special peculiarities prevailing in our State, without which the contentment of the people and the welfare of the State and its subjects cannot really be hoped for.

‘Gentlemen, I believe that, by sanctioning the creation of the Chief Court, we have embarked on a momentous and novel experiment found nowhere in any other part of Rajputana. It is not unlikely that, after the actual experience of a year or more, some changes will be found to be necessary, but the

State has reserved the full right and powers at all times for its Ruler to alter, modify, or add to, the rules, constitution, and composition of the Court. I shall watch over the work and progress made by the Chief Court with the greatest interest and sympathy, and I pray that its career may be crowned with success and that it may before long not only become well established but also be found to be an invaluable and indispensable asset to the State and a boon to its subjects. That the Chief Court will, in due course, bring our judicial system on a par with the efficiency obtaining in other departments I have no doubt.

‘It is the opinion of a large number of experienced and wise men, most qualified to judge, that one of the undesirable features of grafting western methods upon the Indian system of judicial administration is the great delay and the various stages and numbers of appeals before a party can finally attain redress, and keeping this in view I have sanctioned the abolition of the Appeal Court which cuts out one stage of appeal and mitigates the disadvantages arising from the law’s delay.

‘With the provision of an independent, reliable, and up-to-date Supreme Court, it has been held that delay could further be avoided by making the majority of the decisions of the Chief Court final, and I am sure that, in the circumstances, this will cause no misgivings to the public but will, on the other hand, be appreciated by them. For the same reasons it seems unfair in the interests also of the State administration that my time should be uselessly occupied in listening to, and disposing of, frivolous and groundless appeals as has been the case in the past. In accordance, however, with the sentiments of the people and the principles governing such matters in our States, certain appeals in specified cases have still been allowed to come to me about which final orders will invariably be passed by me personally, but the preliminaries in connexion with these will be gone through by the Members of my Council on lines somewhat similar to the system of appeals in the Privy Council in England.

‘It may also be noted that due provision has been made for appeals to come to me in cases of easements and matters relating to rights which have an important and permanent effect on

the parties concerned. At the same time it is considered necessary that frivolous and groundless appeals should not be allowed, and with this object in view I have decided to impose a heavy court fee on appeals coming to me. This I hope will have a salutary effect upon litigants. It has been decided to levy increased fees henceforth in all appeals coming to me, not because it is desired to get increased revenue under this head for the State, but because it is considered desirable to discourage unnecessary appeals.

‘As regards the raising of the court fee on appeals preferred in the lower courts, it is hardly necessary to add, that, when the State has gone to the length of providing a competent Court with so much cost to itself, it is not unreasonable that those who would benefit by it should pay for the better and more speedy justice that they are sure to get under the present reformed system. As far as the total cost of appeals is concerned, this will not affect the pockets of the parties, inasmuch as instead of two appeals at half rates there will now be one appeal at full court fee.’

The main feature of the new judicial system was the establishment of a Chief Court, later changed into a High Court, with a chief justice and two puisne judges, as the highest court of appeal and of original jurisdiction in the State under the Maharaja. On the original side this court was to be presided over by one judge from whom appeal lay to the bench of the other two judges on the appellate side. All appeals lay to a bench of two or more judges, and when only two judges sat on the bench, differences of opinion were referred to a full bench of all three. The powers conferred on the Chief Court were very considerable. It was empowered to pass any sentence authorized by law, except that no sentence of death could be carried into effect unless it had been confirmed by the Maharaja. From sentences of death, transportation for life, or imprisonment for a period of ten years or over, there lay an appeal from the decision of the High Court to the Maharaja. In civil cases all orders and decrees of the Chief

Court were final except where the amount or value of the subject-matter of the suit in the Court of first instance was Rs. 10,000 or over and in cases involving rights or easements against the State when the Chief Court differed from the decision of the lower court. The Chief Court was also given the right of supervision and control of the lower courts. The executive and judiciary were thus completely separated—a reform of the first importance in view of the long-standing demand for this change even in British India.

Another important administrative reform was carried through at this time mainly on the initiative of the Maharaja—the creation of a Revenue Board. The *Mahkma Khas* or the Central Secretariat was also completely overhauled. The portfolios were rearranged for the sake of greater efficiency and distributed among different Members of Council. With a view to greater decentralization and to give the Maharaja more time for the control of general policy the powers of the ministers were greatly enlarged. This system had two beneficent results. The ministers enjoying increased powers were able to supervise and control the departments under them more efficiently and to develop greater initiative in working out schemes for the welfare of the State. It also relieved the Maharaja of a great deal of routine work, enabling him to concentrate his attention on the more important questions of policy, affecting not only the state of Bikaner, but the princes as a whole. In fact, from 1910 the Maharaja began to take interest in general questions of an all-India character, and this was rendered possible only by the administrative devolution carried out in 1910.

In 1905 Bikaner State was honoured by the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales (afterwards King George and Queen Mary). This was the first visit paid to Bikaner by an heir to the British Throne, and the Maharaja, an Honorary Aide-de-Camp to His Royal Highness, was greatly pleased that he should have been marked out for

this honour. Their Royal Highnesses received a most enthusiastic welcome, and, besides public functions, enjoyed two days' shoot at Gajner. The Prince after his departure from Bikaner wrote to the Maharaja the following letter:

On quitting Bikaner I must once more repeat to you how extremely happy the Princess and I have been in the enjoyment of your charming society and most kind hospitality. We leave with many regrets.

. . . . .  
I can assure you that among the happy recollections that the Princess and I will carry away from India, none will be more cherished than those of our most enjoyable stay at Bikaner, and of the friendship between you and ourselves which has been so firmly cemented.

The visit marked the beginning of those cordial and intimate relations which existed personally between His late Majesty and His Highness and which lasted till His Majesty's universally lamented demise. Ever since the Maharaja had come of age every Viceroy had included Bikaner in the list of States to be officially visited.

There is much similarity in the official visits of Viceroys to the capitals of Indian States—red carpets, guards of honour, official receptions at the station, festoons on the way, visits and return visits, laying of the foundation-stone of some public building, military review, some shooting, and the grand finale of the State banquet, where compliments are exchanged between the King's representative and the Maharaja. The strict etiquette that prevails—it has been irreverently remarked that much time is wasted on both sides in measuring the length of the carpet on which the Viceroy has to advance to receive the Ruler—gives to the occasion a rigidity and formality difficult for those unaccustomed to Court life to imagine. Every single item in the programme, from the time the Viceroy arrives at a station to the time he departs, is governed

by ceremonial on both sides. Naturally a great deal of artificiality cannot be avoided. But it would be wrong to look upon these visits as mere occasions of elaborate ceremonial, where the pomp and circumstance of the State are displayed on the one hand, and the paramountcy of the Crown is given visible expression on the other. The Viceroy, before his appointment, has, generally speaking, no personal knowledge of India. At Calcutta (now Delhi) and Simla he only knows the States from the files which come up to him, or from the reports of the Political Department, or from the usual entertainment of rulers at lunch or dinner, or on great ceremonial occasions like investitures of Indian Orders. Visits to Indian States, when the representative of the King is enabled to see the Ruler in his own surroundings and to appreciate his problems of administration and, above all, to establish personal contact outside the routine of office, have therefore very great political value, and as such are greatly looked forward to by the Viceroys and Princes alike. Indian political practice has more or less definite rules regarding the visit of the Viceroy. The Viceroy, for example, does not generally stay in a State for more than three days. The three days' visit itself is confined to the more important States, while in others the Viceroy stops for a day, or a few hours for lunch or tea. It is seldom that the Viceroy visits the same State officially more than once, and when such a visit is repeated it is a mark of special courtesy.

The visit of Lord Elgin during the Maharaja's minority has already been mentioned. In 1902 Lord Curzon went to Bikaner. As it was the first visit paid by a Viceroy after the Maharaja had assumed powers, His Highness had made very elaborate preparations. Not only was the visit a success, but Lord Curzon departed greatly impressed with the personality, vision, and administrative ability of the Maharaja. But for all that, it was only a ceremonial function. Lord Minto's visit was different. Every one in



India knew that in Lord Minto they had a friend. The Princes especially realized that the new Viceroy stood for other principles than those which Lord Curzon had enunciated in public and carried out with thoroughness in official life. They knew that Lord Minto was anxious to strengthen the position of the Princes, to safeguard their rights, and maintain their dignities. His visit was therefore more than a cold and formal affair, and when, after grouse shoots, military reviews, and prize-givings, the host and the guest sat down to the State banquet, there was established between them a real understanding and friendship. In the banquet speech the Maharaja opened out his heart. He spoke of his endeavours, the success which had so far attended his administration, the sympathy and help he had received from the Agents to the Governor-General, and of his hopes and ambitions for the future.

“The eight years during which I have been administering my State can, I think, be described as the most eventful time of my career. They have been so full of pleasures and sorrows, of doubts and difficulties, of elations and depressions on the achievement or failure of the ends in view. I think I can also truthfully say that I have throughout worked, not with any self-interest or with any desire of self-aggrandizement, but with the solid and sincere aim in view firstly, to do all I can for bettering the condition of my people and making their lot a happier one, and, secondly, to develop and husband the resources of my State and to provide as efficient an administration as lies in my power. If there have been any selfish motives, they have been a not unnatural desire on my part to endeavour to win the love of my people and to leave, with Divine assistance, such a legacy to my son and heir as may enable him, when the time comes, to steer his course with fewer doubts and difficulties than have, in the ordinary course of events, fallen to my lot.

“But, your Excellency, it is a case of “Man proposes and God disposes”. In spite of all our efforts, we find ourselves confronted, in some directions, with difficulties which, on account of the peculiar conditions of the State, I might almost describe

as superhuman, and which we, in Bikaner, are certainly unable to cope with, try as we may. I do not refer here to that part of the State where, owing to heavy desert sand, nothing much can at any time be done, but to a fair portion of the country which, fertile in the extreme, is lying waste for want of irrigation; and we are also not getting now what little water we used to, in the Mirzawala and Bhadra tehsils from the Sirhind and Western Jumna Canals. The little Ghaggar Inundation Canals, from which we had certain expectations when they were made a few years ago, have also sadly disappointed us. The amount of our rainfall, at all times of the scantiest, has, in later years, been scantier still. Against the annual average of a little over 11 inches, we recorded only 3·40 inches of rainfall in the year 1905, whilst when the rains completely failed throughout India in 1899, resulting in the appalling famine of that year, our total rainfall reached the negligible amount of only 1·14 inches. In most parts of the State only one crop is sown—the kharif—and that too is entirely dependent on this magnanimous rainfall. It also very often happens that while the rains commence auspiciously, they fail in August or September. Thus the maturing of the crops becomes a matter of great difficulty and sometimes an impossibility.

‘Only those living in India realize the vital importance of a good rainfall and a sufficient supply of water. If this applies to India generally, how much more vitally, I ask, does it affect us in Bikaner? The trying days preceding and during the rains in Bikaner can never be forgotten by those who have been here at those times, when practically the first thing that every one from the highest to the lowest does, on getting up in the morning, is to scan the skies for the welcome sign of even a passing cloud, and anxiously to look to the direction of the wind. Generally one’s hopes are blasted by a dust-haze or a howling dust storm, and not the slightest sign of a cloud anywhere.

‘Although our experience has taught us that it wants more cloud than one no bigger than a man’s hand to give rain in poor dried up Bikaner, yet while there is even a particle of a cloud, there is hope. But generally it is conspicuous by its absence when most wanted, whereas in November, when it is too early for it to be of any real use, and specially when we

expect distinguished guests, dark clouds invariably threaten to spoil our famous grouse shoots.

'Scarcity in this State, as I have often said before, is, alas! the rule and not the exception. In ordinary scarcities the people emigrate to more favoured parts with their families and cattle, and while most of them come back year by year to battle with the same hardships, many of them go away to stay, which chiefly accounts for our census figures falling from 832,000 in 1891 to 584,627 in 1901. Should the conditions be worse and a famine invade us, the distress can better be imagined than described. Although the State doggedly combats the pitiless foe, as we did in 1899-1900 and before that, yet we feel that it is fighting against the forces of Nature and that the odds are heavily against us. The people are crippled, and their stock is almost impossible to save in spite of the best endeavours of all concerned. The State is very often plunged in debt and loses both ways, for the revenue falls far short of the demand, while the surpluses, if any, are exhausted in affording necessary relief, thus greatly hampering us in embarking on a programme of constructive works and of discovering and developing the latent possibilities of the State.

'Then again, after a few fair years, when the people have almost recovered their position and replenished their stock, and the State has pulled itself together and extricated itself from debt, and the prospects are generally brighter all round, down comes a bolt from the blue, in the shape of another famine, which in one fell stroke undoes the labours of many years and sets at naught all our united efforts and self-denials of the past.

'While my brother, the late Maharajah, was more fortunate, there have been very few good years since my accession, and the only good one since my coming of age was that following the famine. In the last two years we have been through a most anxious period and have each time been providentially saved at the eleventh hour. Though the powers of endurance of my people are very great, I often ask myself how much longer we can go on if things do not improve.

'The picture, which I have sketched here, might perhaps appear to be somewhat exaggerated to those not intimately

acquainted with the difficulties and hardships we have to encounter in these parts. It is, I assert, nevertheless, painted in its true colours.

‘But there is, mercifully, a silver lining to every cloud, and a ray of hope has, at last, pierced the gloom. There was a time when, during the famine of 1899–1900, a valued and old friend of mine, Colonel Dunlop Smith, whom I am delighted to see here this evening, while he was Famine Commissioner in Rajputana made informal inquiries as to the possibility of our getting a good canal into Bikaner and was advised that it was quite impossible. Happily, thanks to the generous and broad-minded policy inaugurated by Lord Curzon, to treat, for such purposes, every part of India from an Imperial point of view without regard to the accident of its lying in British India or in the territories of our States, the Irrigation Commission was appointed, as an outcome of which the Rajputana States received the benefit of the advice of a Consulting Engineer for famine protective and irrigation works in the person of Colonel Sir Swinton Jacob, who is universally known to be an officer of exceptional ability and great experience.

‘In the meanwhile, we, on our part, were not idle. We got the loan of the services of Mr. Standley, an irrigation officer, from the Government of India and began to look about us for suitable sites for irrigation bunds or tanks. The first bund ever constructed in this State was started at Madh in 1904, followed shortly afterwards by another at Pilap, both near Gajner in the Magra district. But these, at best only comparatively small projects, are also entirely dependent on the annual rainfall, and ill fortune has continued persistently to dog our footsteps, for, since they have been built, very little rain has fallen in those parts. Owing to the formation of the country being unfavourable, it was also found that practically no other bunds could profitably be built.

‘We then turned our attention to a bolder aspect of the question, viz., a careful and searching investigation as to the feasibility of bringing a canal from some big river in the Punjab. Levels were found to be favourable and there appeared to be no reason why, with the help and support of the Government of India, we could not get canals into our State.

Sir Swinton Jacob, in the course of his tour here, after going into the evidence of the Irrigation Commission, very strongly supported our proposal, with the result that, upon our representing the matter to the Government of India, we found that we were within measurable distance of the realization of our hopes.

'The sympathetic interest displayed by Your Excellency in the welfare of my State encourages me to believe that we may confidently look forward to a continuance of the same Imperial policy, and to our economic salvation from your Excellency's Government who have already lent us a helping hand and done so much to bring the scheme to a more definite shape. As the country which will be irrigated under the present project forms only a part of the more fertile portion of the State, we would beg that, so far as possible, Bikaner should also receive the benefit of any future projects that may come up for the consideration of the Government of India. The phenomenal floods in the Suratgarh Nizamat from the Ghaggar river due to the abnormal rainfall in the Himalayas this year, and the heavy rain in September of the year before, have proved the productive powers of that part of the State, as your Excellency has seen for yourself round Hanumangarh. The immunity which we should enjoy from famine and the permanent release of my people from their bond of misery, coupled with the fact that a large tract of sandy desert had been converted into a green garden waving with corn and grain, would, I venture to say, constitute one of the greatest achievements and transformations under British rule in India, while, on the other hand, your Excellency and Lord Curzon will be remembered by the people of Bikaner as their greatest benefactors and may be assured of their everlasting gratitude and affection.'

The Viceroy replied in suitable terms. He congratulated the Maharaja on the achievements of his reign and promised sympathetic consideration of the request for sharing the water of the Sutlej. The ice had been broken. The great scheme towards the realization of which the Maharaja was to devote a quarter of a century was definitely put on the *tapis*.

For a second time Lord Minto went to Bikaner in 1908-9. The visit was informal, but it was clear to all that it established a new relationship between the ruler of Bikaner and the representative of the Crown. The unwritten rule which limited the formal visit of the Viceroy to a State to one occasion is broken by the informal visits of the Viceroys to States the rulers of which stand on friendly personal relations. Every one knew that Bikaner was an important Rathore State; that its young Ruler had achieved much and had been marked out for special courtesies. The official visit is a matter of formality. The informal visit is a question of friendship. Lord Minto, in visiting Bikaner for the second time, announced to the world that the Maharaja was one who stood in favour with the Government, and whose achievements in his State had received their warm approbation.

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## *Chapter Six*

### THE SILVER JUBILEE

ON the 13th of December 1909 Her Highness Maji Sri Chandravatiji Sahiba, the mother of the Maharaja, passed away. She had been ailing for some time, but no one thought that her end was so near. The Maharaja, who was devoted to her, was constantly at her side during her illness. Her death came quite suddenly, and the whole State was plunged into grief. She had by her piety, charity, and high sense of duty endeared herself greatly to the people of Bikaner. One story characteristic of her self-denial may be mentioned here. When Maharaj Sri Lall Singhji, her husband, died almost immediately after the accession of their young son to the throne, the Regency Council demanded from her a sum of nine lakhs of rupees which had been left to her by her husband. It was her private money and the State had no claim to it in any manner. But the Regency Council was insistent. The widowed princess had no one from whom she could even take advice. She pointed out that the money belonged to her husband's estate and could not be justly claimed by the Council. The reply of the Regency Council was that unless the amount was given to the State, her son—the Maharaja—would be taken away from her. On this she willingly gave up her small fortune but later the Maharaja restored the amount with interest to the family of his father which had been continued by the adoption of his own younger son.

Her own part in the education and upbringing of the Maharaja and her keen interest in all matters affecting his welfare were fully recognized by Sir Charles Bayley and Sir Brian Egerton who had charge of the Maharaja during his boyhood. Unlike most Indian mothers of

orthodox training she never stood in the way of any arrangements made for the better education and training of her son, even when they involved departures from her own accepted notions. On the other hand she co-operated in every way with the guardians and tutors under whose charge the Maharaja was brought up, and thereby earned the gratitude of both the Maharaja and the people of Bikaner. Her piety and charity were proverbial in the State. Her efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the sick and her solicitude for the welfare of the people of Bikaner made her a venerated personality throughout the State. As Sir Eliot Colvin, the Agent to the Governor-General, justly observed in his condolence telegram to the Maharaja, her death was for the Bikaner State a public loss.

By nature a proud man who kept his sorrows and joys to himself, on this occasion the Maharaja was unable to contain his feeling of desolation, and he poured out his grief into the sympathetic ear of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, later King George. His Royal Highness, who knew what the Maharaja's mother had been to him, was greatly moved and the bereavement brought them together in a greater degree than before.

Her Highness the first Maharani Sri Ranawatji Saheba had passed away in 1906. By her the Maharaja had three children of whom the eldest died after a few hours of life. The second was a princess, whose health was also a source of concern to the Maharaja. The princess, in fact, fell a victim to tuberculosis, as will be mentioned later. The third issue, Maharajkumar Sadul Singhji, was born on the 7th of September 1902. His Highness married a second time, but he was not fortunate enough to have any issue by that marriage. In accordance with the injunctions of the Hindu religion the Maharaja therefore married again on the 3rd of May 1908. By this marriage he had three children: Prince Bijay Singhji who was born on the 29th of



March 1909, Prince Vir Singhji born in 1910, and a daughter born in 1916. The Maharaja was still in deep mourning for his mother when Prince Vir Singhji, who was then only five months old, fell ill and died.

In May King Edward passed away. The Maharaja, who was Aide-de-Camp to the new King when he was Prince of Wales, was shortly afterwards gazetted A.D.C. to the King with the rank of Colonel and was invited to England to take part in His Majesty's Coronation. The Maharaja left for England on the 6th of May the following year, accompanied by the Maharajkumar and attended by a small staff. The party reached London on the 22nd of May and the Maharaja was privileged to take part in all the ceremonies connected with the Coronation. During this visit he was also the recipient of the degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Cambridge. A visit to the Imperial capital to participate in a great ceremony is usually a strain, and the Maharaja, as the honorary A.D.C. of the King-Emperor and one of the principal notabilities of the Empire, had more than his share of social engagements. Thus the two months he spent in London were hardly less strenuous than when at his work in Bikaner and, if anything, were more of a strain to the Maharaja. Immediately after the functions connected with the Coronation came to an end he left England and returned to his State.

Though the Maharaja's duties in connexion with the Coronation in England were over, his duties in India in regard to the Imperial Durbar which His Majesty was attending in person were only beginning. He had been nominated a member of the Durbar Committee by Lord Hardinge and thus shared the responsibility for making the detailed arrangements for the great and historic function which was contemplated. To one who is so strict about the details of ceremonials the work on the Committee was no empty honour. At the Imperial Durbar the Maharaja participated in his dual capacity, as one of

the premier Ruling Princes of Rajputana and as A.D.C. to His Majesty. Standing by the side of the King-Emperor, his soldierly figure attracted much attention. So, far, the public of India knew him only by report as one of the progressive princes of Rajputana. The Coronation Durbar brought him prominently to the public eye and made his personality familiar to the leaders of British India. Constant attendance on His Majesty also brought him into closer contact with the royal family, though his association with the King-Emperor dating from the coronation of his father had already ripened into friendship.

It will be remembered that one of the changes announced at the Coronation Durbar was the transfer of the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi. This announcement was greatly appreciated by the Princes who foresaw in it a policy of bringing them into closer contact with His Majesty's representative. Many of the rulers had long and historic associations with Delhi. In any case, Calcutta was not only geographically inconvenient but was also predominantly British Indian in tradition and characteristics. When this announcement was made His Highness presented to the new capital a beautiful statue of Queen Mary executed by Sir George Frampton, which now stands on one side of the main steps of the Viceroy's House.

After the Coronation Durbar Mr. Gokhale, who was at that time the most outstanding personality in British India, conceived the idea of sending a message of goodwill and friendship from the princes and people of India to the English nation through the Prime Minister of Britain expressing the high appreciation of the influence exercised by the visit of their Majesties in drawing closer the bonds that unite England and India.

At Mr. Gokhale's suggestion the Maharaja came into touch with his brother princes, and, as a result, the following message was sent:

'The princes and people of India desire to take the opportunity afforded by the conclusion of the Royal visit to convey to the great English nation an expression of their cordial goodwill and fellowship; also an assurance of their warm attachment to the world-wide Empire of which they form part, and with which their destinies are now indissolubly linked.

'Their Imperial Majesties' visit to India, so happily conceived and so successfully completed, has produced a profound and ineffaceable impression throughout the country. Their Imperial Majesties, by their gracious demeanour, their unfailing sympathy and their deep solicitude for the welfare of all classes have drawn closer the bonds that unite England and India, and have deepened and intensified the traditional feeling of loyalty and devotion to the throne and person of the Sovereign, which has always characterised the Indian people.

'Conscious of the many blessings which India has derived from her connexion with England, the princes and people rejoiced to tender in person their loyal and loving homage to Their Imperial Majesties. They are confident that this great and historic event marks the beginning of a new era, ensuring greater happiness, prosperity and progress to the people of India, under the aegis of the Crown.'

In 1912 the Maharaja completed twenty-five years of his reign. In actual fact he had exercised effective powers for barely thirteen years. But those thirteen years had been crowded with activity and had seen Bikaner transformed into a modern State. A few figures will show the change that had been made. When the Maharaja assumed the administration revenue stood at Rs. 20 lakhs. In 1912 it had jumped up to Rs. 44½ lakhs. The State was served by 87 miles of railway in 1898, in 1912 it had nearly 400 miles. Natural resources were being exploited, coal and other available minerals were being worked. The condition of the ryots had greatly improved; encouragement had been given to *rabi* cultivation; cotton crop was introduced in suitable areas and steps had been taken to improve live stock. Though the much-longed-for canal irrigation

scheme had not yet materialized, well irrigation had made steady progress and over 550 new wells had been sunk.

The improvements in the administrative system have been dealt with in the previous chapters. To have provided the State not only with a strong executive machinery, but to have created an up-to-date judicial organization, promulgated laws which brought the State up to the level of British India, called into being an efficient police force which maintained law and order throughout the State—these were indeed sufficient achievements in the field of administration for a Ruler of which he could be genuinely proud. But the activities of the Maharaja did not stop with perfecting the machinery. Better and more civilized life for the people of the State is the ideal motto for a Ruler to pursue. The Hindu sacred texts define the ideals of kingship thus:

‘Between the night I am born and the night I die, whatever good I might have done, my heaven, my life, my progeny, may I be deprived of, if I oppress you.’

‘I shall see to the growth of the country, considering it always as “God”. Whatever law there is here, and whatever is dictated by ethics, and whatever is not opposed to polity, I will follow. I shall never act arbitrarily.’

‘To thee this State is given, thou art the director and regulator; thou art steadfast and will bear this responsibility of the trust so given for agriculture, for well-being, for prosperity and for development.’

and this was the ideal the Maharaja had taken for himself.

In other fields also the achievements of this period were no less striking. The number of schools in the State had steadily increased. A second-grade college had been established at the capital. The nobles’ school trained the sons of the chiefs and sirdars to the peaceful service of the State. Education was provided also for girls. Similar was the advance in regard to hospitals and medical aid. When the Regency Council handed over the reins of

government there were only two hospitals in the whole State. From the beginning the Maharaja showed great interest in this aspect of progress and by 1912 not only was the capital provided with well-equipped hospitals and dispensaries, staffed by competent doctors, but the blessings of modern medical service were made available in the remote districts.

Apart from this record of progress there were personal achievements which also were unusual. The Maharaja had successfully fought a terrible famine when he was scarcely nineteen and earned the praise of the most experienced administrators; had taken personal part in a strenuous campaign in far-off China; had been invested with honours, which came to him not as indications of high rank but for exceptional services rendered to the Empire or to his own State. Naturally there was a note of pride in the celebrations and festivities of the silver jubilee. It was an occasion when a young Ruler, who started with so few advantages and who in a short time had achieved so much, could justifiably add a note of satisfaction to his speeches.

The Jubilee was celebrated with *éclat*. His Highness was the proud recipient of a direct cable from His Majesty King George who said:

'I heartily congratulate you upon your having completed 25 years' rule over your State and I wish you and your people many years of happiness and prosperity.'

The celebrations in the State took place on the proper date in September. The Maharaja went through different religious ceremonies, made gifts to charity according to tradition, received addresses from various public bodies, and finally announced various boons according to old Hindu custom. In the congratulatory addresses presented by his subjects on this occasion there was a feeling not only of loyalty on the part of the people but of affectionate pride in the achievements of their Maharaja.

The programme of the jubilee, though simple, was such as to touch the imagination of the people of Bikaner. On the 20th and the 21st various 'At Homes' and functions for civil and military officers were held. On Sunday the 22nd the Maharaja went in State procession with all the paraphernalia of royalty and with due pomp and circumstance to the family temple of Lakshmi Narayanji to perform the necessary religious ceremonies. On the 23rd took place the military ceremony of the presentation of colours. The 24th was the actual jubilee day. The day broke with the booming of 101 salutes, and this was followed by the old Indian custom of releasing selected prisoners on auspicious days. At 8.30, after attending religious functions, the Maharaja held a public Durbar at the Ganga Niwas Hall, where the Resident, the nobles, and the officials of the State were present in their full-dress uniform. Colonel Windham, in a congratulatory speech, justly remarked that the occasion was one of stock-taking.

'His Highness succeeded to the gadi', he said, 'when he was only seven years old, and from the earliest possible opportunity, applied himself with a real earnestness and conspicuous ability to the task of governing his splendid heritage—an ancient Rajput kingdom—and of devising for it a progressive policy of all-round reform. His Highness has to-day, what must be the immense satisfaction of hearing Time—the truest and most impartial of critics—pronounce an unqualified verdict of success on—I think I may fairly say—nearly all that has been attempted and done.'

The Resident added:

'To even realize properly all that His Highness's rule has meant for the State would be difficult enough; while to attempt any statement of it would be almost an impossible task. I shall, therefore, merely confine myself to saying that the revenue has leaped up by lakhs and more than doubled itself; while peace and a smiling prosperity now almost universally prevail,

where internal rebellion and other grave troubles previously cast their black shadow. I should like just to add a word about what always strikes me as perhaps one of the most distinctive results of His Highness's rule. There is probably no State in India where the immemorial culture and genius of the East and the traditions of the Ruler and his race are more happily blended with the science, energy, and practical activity of the West than they are in Bikaner. Evidences of this are to be seen in every direction; in fact of Bikaner it can I think quite truly be said that good healthy tradition and reform are, so to speak, the warp and the woof of the administration.'

His Highness's speech at the durbar was characteristic. After offering in all humility his devout thanks to God, the Maharaja took a glance backward over the eventful period that lay behind him:

'Of the past twenty-five years, nearly fourteen cover the period since I attained my majority and assumed the reins of government. Throughout that time, I have laboured earnestly and incessantly, according to the light within me, to promote the prosperity of my State and the welfare of my people.

'Though I am conscious that much yet remains to be done, I thank God that I can, in all modesty, look back upon this period with the satisfaction which is the reward of every ruler, who is conscious of having tried to do his duty to his God, to his Emperor, to his State, and to his people.

'The introduction of far-reaching and important reforms in the various branches of the State administration—executive and judicial, the strengthening of the finance department of the State and the placing of it on a sound footing by the appointment at its head of an expert and able officer, the removal of any defects that existed before, the employment of better paid and more competent officers, the liberal expenditure of public money on much-needed public works, on education, on sanitation, and on medical relief, on the extension of railways, on the increased means of water-supply in the shape of constructing and repairing wells, tanks, and bunds, the suppression of

dacoities and the marked decrease of serious crime, the security of life, liberty, and property, which is now enjoyed by every one throughout the length and breadth of the State, and the perfect peace and tranquillity which reign within my borders—these are all indications of the fact that the efforts which have been made to promote the well-being of the State and the people, have not been without success; whilst the vast improvements and the many buildings, which have tended to beautify the capital, have altogether changed Bikaner from what it was even fourteen years ago. Efforts have been made from almost the beginning of my administration to secure the priceless blessings of canal irrigation in a not inconsiderable portion of the State. By the grace of God and the sympathetic co-operation of the Government of India, we are, I hope, within a measurable distance of achieving success, and by the fruition of this most important Sutlej Canal irrigation scheme, an era of hitherto unknown prosperity will be opened to the people of Bikaner.

‘I am not so vain as to claim the credit for all this entirely for myself. My share for the greater part has lain in giving my hearty approval and support to the many European and Indian officers who have formed the backbone of my administration, and in rendering the best services in my power to my State and my people. The rest of the credit is due to the able band of officers which it has been my good fortune to collect around me; and one factor which, above all, has contributed to what success we have achieved is that India is under the aegis of British rule. During this period the ruling princes have enjoyed immunity from internecine wars and disturbances, and the time and labour which they had to spend in former days in maintaining their *izzat*, authority, and independence, they have, in the present times of peace, been able wholly to devote to the peaceful development of resources, to the contentment and advancement of their people, and to the progress and prosperity of their States.

‘As I have already said, I recognize full well how much yet remains to be done and I am sure every one will join me in the prayer that, by the same grace of God which has guided and supported us in the past, we shall be enabled to continue to



march on the line of progress and prosperity in the same spirit of true patriotism and self-sacrifice, not only for the rest of my time but also in that of your future Ruler and of those who follow him.'

But the Maharaja was not a man to rest on his laurels. He recognized that every right-minded ruler should also look to the future: that speeches, addresses, and celebrations were all very well in their place, but that a celebration in the life of a ruler will be judged only by what he does for his people. He also recognized that conditions were fast changing in India, and that new ideas and new circumstances required suitable adjustments in the traditional system of government in India. The Maharaja's speech therefore announced the establishment of a People's Representative Assembly for Bikaner, the first of its kind in northern India. In the special circumstances of Bikaner it was a very bold step to take. True, in the States of Travancore, Mysore, and Baroda, representative institutions had been in existence for over twenty years. But the conditions in those States were different. Mysore and Travancore had been for a long time under administrations which approximated more to British Indian provinces. Besides, in all the three States the people were highly educated. The position in Bikaner was different. Its traditions were those of a military State. The nobles and sirdars were still very powerful and had acquiesced in the supremacy of the State only after successive rebellions. Education in spite of great efforts had not made very great progress. In fact, the State had only recently emerged from its feudal traditions. The Representative Assembly was therefore an experiment—a wise and far-seeing step, but still an experiment—and like all experiments uncertain in its results and unforeseeable in its developments.

In announcing the establishment of the Assembly the Maharaja stated in durbar:

‘I can conscientiously say that had the education of the people in general and their public training been higher, I should have gladly welcomed the assistance in the administration of a Legislative Assembly or a Legislative Council in the true sense of the word, but I have no desire to do anything which would be unreal or which would make us the laughing-stock of the world. I can safely promise for myself that should the time come, whether it be in five years or ten years or more, when the people have shown themselves fitted for it, I shall be only too pleased to widen the powers and duties that are now about to be entrusted to the People’s Representative Assembly. All that I aim at, at present, in sanctioning the scheme is to give my subjects not so much an immediate power or voice in the administration as to initiate a system under which they will be trained to become efficient members of a really Representative Assembly with, when the time comes, powers considerably enhanced beyond those laid down in the present scheme.

‘Perhaps I might here attempt to explain the general constitution and duties of the Representative Assembly as it will be to start with. A great many details have yet to be worked out and I do not think it will be possible to inaugurate the meeting of the Representative Assembly until January or February of next year at the earliest, but I may state, subject to any alteration in minor details that may have to be made when the scheme is completed, that the Assembly will consist of some 20 to 30 members comprising *ex officio* and nominated, as well as elected, members.

‘While there will be no restrictions as to caste or creed, and steps will be taken with a view to having the various important communities represented on the body, I have no thought of giving any special privileges, in the way of nomination or election on the grounds of religion, because, as His Excellency the present Viceroy said in a speech which he made shortly after his arrival in India “special privileges to one class are synonymous with corresponding disabilities to others”.

‘As regards their powers, I hope to be able to give this Assembly the same powers as those of the Imperial Legislative Council of His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General

of India as regards the right of interpellation, of moving resolutions, as well as of submitting private Bills. One difference is that a copy of the sanctioned budget will be laid on the table of the Assembly and any suggestions and remarks offered by the Assembly will be duly considered by the Durbar later. In regard to legislative measures, private members will have the right, subject to the usual conditions, of discussing State Bills and of presenting Bills to the Assembly and of proposing amendments and expressing their opinions. These Bills will be dealt with by me in Council in the same way as is done now. Except, therefore, in cases of emergency, no Bills will be passed unless they have first been discussed in the Representative Assembly. As regards the budget, the Assembly will have nearly the same powers as the Imperial Legislative Council under the Indian Councils Act of 1892.

‘The ultimate power of accepting or rejecting resolutions or recommendations rests with the Ruler and the Durbar.

‘It follows that when the views of the Representative Assembly on matters of legislation and the budget come before me and the Durbar, they will naturally receive due consideration; and according as the Assembly conducts its business with loyalty, dignity, public spirit, and self-sacrifice, so will its opinions and proposals receive more weight and consideration.

‘No similar Assembly could start under better auspices. It has not only the sincere goodwill of myself and the Members of my Administration but we all welcome its members as partners in the responsible duties of administering and strengthening the State.

‘The future of this Assembly rests in the hands of God and to a less extent in its own hands. Its salvation and that of the Ruler of the State, the State itself, and the subjects of the State, can only be attained by a system of peaceful evolution to the advantage of all concerned. I can only pray and hope that the confidence which I am reposing in my people in thus spontaneously conferring upon them this substantial privilege, will be as warmly reciprocated by a loyal and patriotic effort on their part to make this experiment a complete success by the disregard of selfish interest and by their determination to serve me and my successors and my State with loyalty, faithfulness, and devotion. May God bless this undertaking.’

It was clearly only a beginning; but the association of the people with the active government of a State is at all times a momentous step requiring careful consideration at every stage. The only safe method is that of trial and error, growth from small beginnings and development based on experience and tradition. The Maharaja had no desire to transplant a fully evolved parliamentary government into his State. That would have been merely an unreal paper constitution. But the powers of the Assembly as announced were real enough and gave to the people of Bikaner an opportunity which the subjects of no other Rajput State enjoyed at the time or enjoy to-day of being associated as an integral part of the government.

The other boons which were announced covered a very wide field. Hindi was reintroduced as the State language. The Council of Regency had for no conceivable reason, except the convenience of imported officialdom, introduced Urdu as the official language. This was a source of real trouble to the people of the State whose mother tongue was Hindi and whose business transactions were all conducted in that language. The Maharaja therefore decided very properly to substitute Hindi as the court and official language. Many vexatious customs levies inherited from the time of the regency, such as duties on sewn cloth imported for personal wear and on ornaments for private use, were abolished. Education formed the subject of a number of important concessions. The Government high school was raised to the status of a college. A system of grants-in-aid was introduced and a Director of Education was appointed for the purpose of bringing into effect the policy of the State for the provision of facilities for higher education. Scholarships, boarding accommodation in schools, provision of itinerant mistresses for girls who observe purdah, and other concessions were also included in this scheme. For the purpose of extending the medical services already in

existence, the Maharaja announced the establishment of a zenana (women's) hospital, an X-ray installation at the main hospital, and dispensaries in districts. Nor did the Ruler forget his nobles. Long-standing State dues were remitted: exemption was granted from personal appearance in law courts, and the age of majority for release of estates from the Court of Wards was fixed at eighteen instead of twenty-one. It is indeed proof of the wisdom, sympathy, and success of the Maharaja's policy towards the nobles that at the jubilee, hardly four years after the last punitive measures in connexion with the conspiracy, he was asking for suggestions from a representative body of sirdars for strengthening their position as pillars of the State. Remissions of arrears of revenue were made for agriculturists, and domiciliary rights were granted to outsiders resident in the State. According to old Hindu tradition 15 per cent. of the total number of prisoners in State jails were also set free.

On the same day addresses were presented by the sirdars and various communities in the State congratulating the Maharaja on his jubilee and affirming their loyalty to his person and his throne. The Maharaja's reply showed how deeply he was touched by this spontaneous outburst of loyal feeling from all sections of his subjects.

The jubilee functions were naturally numerous; but there was one which deserves special mention—the banquet given to the Ruler by the European residents of Bikaner at the Victoria Memorial Club. The Maharaja had from the beginning availed himself of the services of selected European officers for his more important technical departments. With rare exceptions they had served him faithfully and loyally. In the public works department, in the railways, in his irrigation projects, he had utilized their technical skill and organizing abilities, and between those officers, who gave ungrudgingly of their best, and their master there had arisen the deep feelings

of mutual appreciation and esteem which come from close and willing co-operation. Colonel Wake, the tutor to the Maharaj kumar, who presided at the banquet, alluded in generous terms to this aspect of the Maharaja's administration :

'We have seen many reforms carried out and many more planned. We have watched His Highness in a daily wrestle with the growing accumulation of work, personally directing and inspiring every department in his State. We have seen palaces and pleasure gardens spring from the desert and mud hovels transformed into avenues of carved stone. We have stood by while he broke records in sport, led his troops in the field, and took his place among the premier Princes of India round the King-Emperor.

'In all his plans and enterprises he has claimed the services of English officers and I dare assert that, with rare exceptions, all have repaid him with loyal service and hearty appreciation. Of the wide hospitality he has offered to us all and the friendship with which he has honoured many it does not become me to speak.'

The Maharaja in his reply, after paying tributes to individual officers, justified his policy of employing European officials in technical appointments in words which show his outlook on this important question :

'Colonel Wake has referred to my utilizing the services of British officers in all my plans and enterprises. The response which they have made I have already acknowledged. The number of British officers participating in the administration of the State has increased very considerably in the past few years, so much so that I am aware that there is a certain amount of unfriendly criticism in this connexion in certain quarters outside our State. But where the interests of the administration are concerned, I allow no room for other considerations. When I feel that the employment of British officers will tend to greater efficiency and usefulness; when the members of my Council feel, as they do, that the British officers are of conspicuous ability and thus eminently fitted to fill the positions they

occupy and that they satisfactorily discharge the duties entrusted to them, it is only natural that we should avail ourselves of their services. Otherwise we should be failing in our duty to the State. Our sole object is to obtain the best possible talents for the particular kind of work required and to put the right man in the right place. The British officers have not only been instrumental in bringing the work of their departments to the requisite standard of efficiency but they have also spared no pains in training the subordinate officers which, in the case of those appointments which are of a temporary nature, will be of especial value hereafter. The British officers in the State service have, on the other hand, I trust, found here a congenial atmosphere in which to work, and I hope and believe, that they have received sympathetic support not only from myself but also from the members of my Council, under whose portfolios their respective departments are constituted. We have thus been able to work in a spirit of mutual co-operation and goodwill to the great advantage of all concerned; and whenever circumstances render it necessary that more British officers should be employed, we shall continue the policy which we have been pursuing so far.'

The question of the employment of European officers in Indian States has never been free from complications. Only too many have been inclined to look upon themselves as a privileged class, entitled to special amenities and consideration; but equally there have been many others who have devoted themselves whole-heartedly to the service of the State in which they are employed and the Ruler whom they are serving. The success of this policy of employing European officers depends almost entirely on two factors—on the right choice of officers being made, and on the personality of the ruler. If the right type of European officer is employed and the ruler is one who, while he is courteous and friendly, is capable of getting the best work out of them, everything proceeds smoothly with the very best results for both parties. The Maharaja was exceptionally fortunate in this matter. The

European officers whom he selected personally and employed in services requiring expert technical skill were generally men of outstanding ability, and on every possible occasion he has given them the credit that is their due in the success which has attended his policy.

The social celebrations of the jubilee were postponed to December in order to enable the Viceroy to attend in person. It was the first visit of Lord Hardinge and the occasion was not merely formal but one of solemn importance. Apart from the usual formalities and ceremonials, the Maharaja, who was already renowned for his hospitality, took special care to mark the greatness of the occasion by arrangements which were in keeping with the traditions of Bikaner and the extraordinary character of the visit.

In February 1913 there was a gathering of princes. Already the Maharaja had made a deep impression on his brother princes, and many of them came to do him honour. The festivities went on for over a week. Among the many important dignitaries and potentates who came to rejoice in the achievements of one so young (the Maharaja was hardly thirty-two), could any one have guessed what the future held in store for their host? Could any one have foreseen or imagined that before another decade elapsed their host would have taken part in the peace negotiations, signed the Treaty of Versailles and the Covenant of the League of Nations, and been elected Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes? As yet he was but one of the rising stars, a great Ruler of a great State. He had not yet stepped on to the all-India stage. The jubilee was in that sense more than the end of an administrative period. It marked also the end of the period of His Highness's isolation, the confinement of his interest to his own State; it saw the beginning of a new period when the Maharaja stood forth as a representative of his own Order and as a champion of his Motherland.



## *Chapter Seven*

### REMOVING THE ISOLATION

THE distinguishing characteristic of the relations between the Indian States and the Government of India until the time of Lord Hardinge (1910-16) was the fact that the States were treated as isolated foreign units. No formal relations of any political nature between rulers of Indian States were permitted, and even social relations such as courtesy visits were looked upon with disfavour. This policy was inherited from the early days of the Company when the rulers of great States of India like the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Maharaja Scindia of Gwalior, and the Maharaja of Indore provided the most formidable opposition to the extension of British authority. The foreign policy of the East India Company kept before it the single aim of preventing a combination of 'Country Powers', and whenever any such power entered into a subsidiary alliance with the British, a condition invariably insisted upon was that the ruler should have no dealings with other rulers, and all differences with neighbouring States should be settled through the arbitrament of the Company. This policy of isolating the States was no doubt necessary in those early days when a combination of the most powerful States under effective leadership could have challenged the military power of the Company. The great rebellion of 1857 only emphasized from the British point of view the necessity of keeping the princes isolated, for, it was argued, if a popular movement without even the connivance of the great States could challenge British power so effectively, what chance was there if the princes were to unite together into a confederacy. In the result the policy of isolation was further strengthened by the events of 1857-8.

Isolation was therefore regarded not only as the outcome of historical circumstances but as a military and political necessity. To allow the princes to meet each other and to consult each other was not only against precedent but was potentially dangerous from the political point of view. The length to which this theory was carried may be judged from the fact that the permission of the political officers was considered necessary for the ruler of one State to go on a social visit to another; that at durbars and gatherings of princes strict watch was kept and report made to the Government of India as to which princes were found visiting others.

It should be recognized that there was another school which considered that the necessity for this isolation had passed and that the best way of harnessing the great authority and prestige of the princes was to seek their co-operation in the Government of India. So early as 1876 Lord Lytton had suggested the creation of an Imperial Privy Council for India composed partly of selected Ruling Princes and partly of officials. The scheme met with opposition from both sides—from the princes who thought that their sovereign position would be lowered by membership of such a council and from officials who feared that the abandonment of the policy of isolation might lead to widespread combination among the princes. The proposal had therefore to be abandoned and Lord Lytton's imagination had to rest content with the award of a new title of 'Counsellors of the Empress' to a few princes. The Viceroy's notification of this was as follows:

'Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India being desirous of seeking from time to time, in matters of importance, the counsel and advice of the Princes and Chiefs of India, and of thus associating them with the Paramount Power in a manner honourable to themselves and advantageous to the general interests of the Empire, has authorized me, through her principal Secretary of State for India, to confer, and

I do hereby confer, in her name and on her behalf, upon the under-mentioned Chiefs and high Officers of Government the most honourable title of "Counsellors of the Empress".'

The Ruling Princes selected were those of Kashmir, Gwalior, Jaipur, Indore, Bundi, Sind, Rampur, and Travancore, but the Council never met; no one else was ever nominated to it, and not so many years later Lord Dufferin is said to have coined the witticism 'Counsellors of the Empress, R.I.P.'. The Council died, it is true, but the mere fact that it was formed showed the trend of thought induced by the creation of the Empire. In the same year Lord Lytton assembled together under his presidency the princes of Rajputana to consider the establishment of the Mayo College. This was a notable event, for it was the first time that a large number of princes was assembled together under the presidentship of the Viceroy to consult on a matter of importance to themselves. In the time of Lord Curzon two other conferences of this nature were held: the Chiefs' College Conference in 1904 and the consultation of the Ruling Princes regarding Imperial Service troops in 1905. The Conference of 1904 saw a remarkable development. In the Conference of 1877 had sat old-fashioned potentates, rather bewildered, and considering the whole matter as a tiresome business. In 1904 the Princes handed to the Viceroy a collective note (shades of isolation!) in which they said 'what we— . . . one and all do feel most strongly is that we are ready and willing not only to offer our advice but to spend our time and labour in real effort on important matters which involve wide public interests'. The wheels of history move slowly, especially in the normal relations of the Government of India and the States. In the time of Lord Minto, though he took the princes into consultation in the matter of dealing with terrorism and sedition, the idea of their collective association only lay dormant. But Lord Hardinge from the beginning of his régime was far-sighted

enough to see what possibilities of imperial co-operation lay in the close association of the Government of India and the States. The Maharaja of Bikaner had been actively interested in this idea for a long time. In January 1914 His Highness gave to the Viceroy a minute in which he traced the idea of creating some machinery which would secure sustained and intimate co-operation between the two Indias. After expressing the disappointment of the Princes that the proposal mooted at the time of the Minto-Morley Reforms of the Government of India to create an advisory Council of Princes had fallen through, the Maharaja proceeded to argue:

‘The present juncture is thus one of very serious crisis for the States and they feel most gravely the danger of being left behind and shut out altogether. Their hopes have been raised by the history of their connection with the British Government, and particularly by the various acts and proposals of the Government of India referred to above, as also by Lord Curzon’s speeches, and they are proud to be components of the greatest Empire that the world has so far seen. They most earnestly implore the Government of India not to let the catastrophe of practical exclusion fall upon them. They do not wish to become mere puppets and to share the fate of some of the European aristocracies. They feel that they have a legitimate sphere which is in no sense opposed, but only complementary, to the democratic element in British India. They represent the people of their States and speak for them at the gate.

‘As great self-governing Feudatories the States and Princes of India are unique in the whole British Empire—indeed their only parallel in the world are those now composing the united German Empire—and they desire to justify and live up to this position which to them is one of very special pride. They ask for at least the same proportional voice in India as the States of Germany have in that great Empire, and they hold that in view of their relations with the Crown, their services as administrative ‘partners’ and in other ways, and their

position *vis-à-vis* their own people, they have the right to make this request.

‘Already public affairs of the greatest moment are being handled by the new power in British India, and matters which very closely affect the interests of the States are discussed and disposed of in the Legislative Councils without any real reference to the Ruling Chiefs or any formal opportunity to them of representing the views of their own people. Sometimes they read of these things quite accidentally in the public press and bring them to the notice of the Government of India through the political officers, and sometimes the Government of India are good enough to favour them with a request for an opinion, but it often, and indeed generally, happens that the bearing on the States of a question raised in British India is neither seen nor suspected, nor indeed can it be, except by the Ruling Chiefs themselves, no matter how carefully the Government of India may watch to protect their interests.

‘All other things apart, the States at least constitute one-third of the whole of India and yet there is only one officer in the Governor-General’s Legislative Council who is directly connected with them or who can in any way be said to represent them; and a study of the ways of these assemblies makes it perfectly clear that, however great the personality and influence of that officer may be, he cannot balance, to the extent of one-third of India, a tendency or tone that may be indifferent or hostile to the interests of the States. For instance, last March when the question of extradition from the Presidency towns to the courts of Indian States was dealt with by the Governor-General’s Legislative Council there was no one amongst the members with intimate or practical experience of the working of the States to defend their cause—except the Foreign (now Political) Secretary—with the result that the weight of the British representatives, whose opinion was not favourable to the States, was perhaps too great to be resisted altogether.

‘It is obvious that the great hereditary princes could not, with due regard to their dignity and their position before their own people, sit in the same Councils as the classes of persons who at present obtain the nominations of the Government and the suffrages of the electors, but if things go on as they now do

and matters of Imperial concern are left to these Councils without them, the very existence of the States—the continuance of which will always remain, so long as history lasts, the highest testimony to the greatness and nobility of British rule—may be dangerously threatened, and the true self-government of India by the Indians, the product of thousands of years of evolution on indigenous lines, may be lost altogether, the whole Government of India sinking to a drab dead level of democracy without any of the interest or distinction that is suited to the religions, the instincts and the imagination of the people.

‘Arguing on these lines the time would certainly seem to have come when something must be done to show that the Ruling Chiefs, who, on the whole, command a not inconsiderable amount of respect in British India also, should, as the representatives and leaders of their States, have some formal part in the government of the Empire. They have a right, in view of their partnership and of their contributions towards the defence of the Empire, to be heard in regard to the great matters of Imperial interest, and they also desire to have an opportunity for mutual consultation and for the discussion of matters affecting their own Order.

‘But a nucleus for action already exists in the Chiefs’ College Conference. It met this year and is to meet again, and it is always open to the Viceroy to call together the leading Indian rulers to advise His Excellency on any matter that he wishes.

‘Certainly no time could possibly be more auspicious for making a real beginning in this direction than the present. In His Imperial Majesty King George V, the States and their rulers under his protection have a gracious Emperor who has shown his sympathy for them, and his interest in them, in the most whole-hearted and unmistakeable manner, and for this they are devoutly thankful; while Lord Hardinge’s own keen interest in the welfare and progress of the States and His Excellency’s characteristic sympathy with the Ruling Princes in the difficult task they have to perform is also well-known. The important announcement made by Mr. Montagu in his speech in the House of Commons during the last Indian Budget debate to the effect that “the conferences which are to

be held from time to time at Delhi or Simla to which Ruling Princes will be invited will give them opportunities of meeting one another and of discussing alterations of custom, of practice, or of rule" shows clearly that His Excellency the Viceroy already has such an intention—a fact which will undoubtedly give genuine and universal satisfaction to the entire body of the Ruling Princes.

‘Another step would be, when any question arises in the Governor-General’s Legislative Council affecting even remotely the interests of the States, for His Excellency to direct that, before a decision is finally arrived at, the matter should be referred for consideration and advice to the Ruling Chiefs whom he would assemble for the purpose.

‘In this way a federal chamber representing all the States—and if necessary, through the Governors and Lieutenant-Governors who could sit with the Ruling Chiefs, the provinces of British India as well—would gradually grow up with, at first, advisory functions only. Other steps would follow. In time no doubt it would be possible for His Excellency the Viceroy to confer some honorific distinction on the members of this body as on those of the Legislative Councils, and for His Imperial Majesty the King-Emperor to further honour them by sending a gracious message at the opening of their deliberations; but I am not for the present concerned with these. The great thing of importance is that the Conference should now be put on a permanent basis without delay by the creation of an office to deal with its business and its records, and the appointment of a Secretary, who need not be a whole-time officer but should be a member of the Political Department—preferably, one with some special personal status who is willing to take up this duty in addition to those he is regularly charged with and who can be spared from the latter to attend the meetings. Much depends on the selection for this post of an officer who is known for his sympathetic bearing, who is of good birth and breeding and who has a constitutional bent of the Rulers’ point of view and is well-known to the majority of the Ruling Chiefs.

‘These are only suggestions. The essential point is to give the States a formal voice of some kind in the government of India before it is too late and before the ancient rocks of Hindusthan, that have weathered storms for many thousand years and on which the whole structure of the Empire has been raised, are overwhelmed and disappear beneath a flood the depth and force of which no man can gauge.’

Significant words—‘a federal chamber representing all the States and . . . the provinces of British India as well’. The Maharaja was looking into the future and had already—as early as 1914—caught a glimpse of that ideal of which he was sixteen years later to be the staunch exponent. Even at this early stage his mind was working towards a federation, and he visualized the organization of Princes only as a necessary first step.

Lord Hardinge was sympathetic towards the idea. Gifted with rare insight and sympathy he had already earned the goodwill and co-operation of the princes which were to stand him in such good stead during the Great War. The Maharaja had come into intimate contact with him as a member of the Coronation Durbar Committee and between them there had developed an understanding and friendship uncommon between rulers and viceroys. The Maharaja recognized in Lord Hardinge a true representative of His Majesty, anxious to help the princes and to maintain their authority and prestige, a friend and champion of India and a great statesman. The Viceroy saw in His Highness not only a ruler with unique achievement in his own State and a conscientious and far-sighted head of a State, but a great personality staunch in his devotion to the Empire, with noble ideals and with a zeal rare in princes, a patriot and a statesman. Mutual esteem and deep friendship followed. The Maharaja’s proposals for some machinery of co-operation with the princes fell, therefore, on sympathetic ears and an early opportunity was taken of giving public expression to these views. In



his address to the Chiefs' College Conference held in Delhi on the 3rd of March 1914, Lord Hardinge alluded to the eagerness of the princes 'to share with me and my Government the burden of Imperial rule'. He concluded the address with an expression of his desire to treat 'Your Highnesses as my trusted colleagues and to seek your collective opinion whenever possible on matters affecting the interests of your Order'. The Maharaja, who spoke in the name of the Princes at the conclusion of the conference, took up this theme.

'Previous Viceroys', he said, 'have also hailed us as colleagues and partners in the administration of India, but it has been your Excellency who by these conferences has given practical effect to this great idea and sown the seed of that organic connection with the Government of India which partnership involves. . . . I am voicing the expressed wish of my brother Princes, not only of those who are present but also of others who are absent, when I say that we trust and we are confident that your Excellency will, before long, convene similar meetings to deal with other subjects in which we and the States we represent are no less closely concerned than in this one of the College, and on which our deliberations will not only be of the greatest advantage to ourselves, our States and our people, but also, we hope, of some value to the Imperial Government, since we represent one-third of the great Indian Empire and one-fourth of its entire population and can, therefore, claim to be the exponents of a considerable proportion of Indian thought and influence. We feel that such consultations are essential and of benefit to our people and we would highly appreciate the honour if Your Excellency as the Representative of our beloved King Emperor, would now convene us to meet at stated intervals and put our business on a regular and proper basis.'

Lord Hardinge accepted this proposal. 'I can assure you', he said in his reply, 'that the ideas expressed by His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner have my warm sympathy.'

These important pronouncements attracted wide attention in India. The *Times of India*, then under the distinguished editorship of Mr. (later Sir) Stanley Reed, in a leading article drew attention to the importance of what passed at the Conference. It said:

‘If this [the establishment of a higher College for Princes] was the only idea thrown out at the Conference there would be nothing for British India to consider; but the Conference was remarkable for a notable general pronouncement by His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner which was subsequently endorsed by the Viceroy.

‘The seed capsule of the Maharaja of Bikaner’s speech was an urgent appeal for closer organic connection between the States and the Government of India. Representing one-third of the Indian Empire and one-fourth of its entire population, he claimed with unanswerable force that the Ruling Chiefs are the exponents of a considerable volume of Indian thought and influence. They have been hailed as colleagues and partners in the administration of India; they are anxious to see this co-operation consolidated into an effective machinery. The Maharaja was careful to indicate the nature of the co-operation which he desired. He said, “I am voicing the expressed wish of my brother Princes, not only of those who are present, but also of others who are absent, when I say that we trust, and we are confident that your Excellency will, before long, convene similar meetings to deal with other subjects in which we and the States represented are no less closely concerned than in this one of the College, and on which our deliberations will not only be of the greatest advantage to ourselves, our States and our people, but also, we hope, of some value to the Imperial Government.” The Maharaja did not ask that the Chiefs should be associated with the governance of India outside their own States; he confined his plea to consultations and conferences in regard to matters concerning themselves, their States and their people. In this he was seconded by the Maharaja Holkar, who expressed his agreement with the request, and supported by His Excellency the Viceroy, who said that these ideas had his warm sympathy. The suggestion

here put forward is of course no new one. The idea of a Council of Princes dates from Lord Lytton's day, and it was revived in the scheme prepared by the Government of India, which formed the basis of the Reform Act. But hitherto it has been reluctantly put aside as desirable but impracticable, and it is impossible not to appreciate the validity of the objections to a scheme which has many attractions in itself. None of these difficulties, however, apply to the more modest proposal advanced by the Maharaja of Bikaner. He does not propose for the moment a concrete organisation, but rather the gradual extension and regularisation of a practice which has already grown up. It is not easy to see any insuperable objection to extending the conference system, which has been found useful and practicable in relation to the education question, to others where the interests of the Chiefs as a whole are concerned. Out of these conferences if the need arise, there may gradually develop the organisation which, complete in itself, has hitherto baffled the wit of those who were anxious to give it shape; if the necessity for an organisation is not manifested, then these meetings will remain periodic conferences and nothing more. But it is almost impossible to resist the conclusion that the conference would gradually induce a far greater solidarity between the Government of India and the Chiefs than the present method of ascertaining their collective opinion; experience in every branch of human affairs indicates that nothing tends so quickly to remove differences as round table discussion.

'None who appreciate the position of the Native States in the polity of India will doubt the urgency of the Maharaja of Bikaner's words. India before our eyes, he said, is developing most rapidly and we are anxious that our States should not be left behind. We are so obsessed by the crowded issues of the day that it is difficult to wrest our gaze free and look to the future. But if we do so, we shall understand that the Native States, like all other parts of the world, cannot stand at gaze.

. . . . .

The Great War which broke out in August 1914 gave a great fillip to the idea. The Princes had so whole-

heartedly identified their interests with the Empire, and had contributed so magnificently in men and money to the prosecution of the War that consultation with them on questions of Imperial policy became necessary. The idea matured quickly and a formal conference of Princes was summoned in 1916.

## *Chapter Eight*

### WAR AND IMPERIAL PROBLEMS

ON the 4th of August 1914 the British Empire declared war on Germany. As soon as he became aware of the prospect of a war in which the Empire might be engaged the Maharaja offered not only the entire resources of his State, but also his own personal services at the disposal of His Majesty. The Maharaja realized that in this great period of crisis for the Empire lay his opportunity for emulating the glorious record of his ancestors on the field. To one so filled with the traditions of the Bika Rathores, seventeen of whom out of twenty-one had actually led their own troops in warfare in distant parts, a great European war in which the forces of the Empire were engaged in a life and death struggle with a mighty enemy was too unique an opportunity to be lost. The Maharaja sent the following cable to the King-Emperor:

To—

His Imperial Majesty the King Emperor  
Buckingham Palace  
London.

Having just heard of outbreak of hostilities between Russia, France and Germany I beg leave most dutifully, should Great Britain also have resort to arms, to place my own sword and services at Your Imperial Majesty's command, either as Member of Your Imperial Majesty's staff, or at the head of my troops and Rajputs, all of whom are equally eager to fight for Your Imperial Majesty in Europe, India or elsewhere, for the safety, honour and welfare of Your Imperial Majesty and your Dominions.

I have the great honour and privilege of having served Your Imperial Majesty as Aide-de-Camp longer than any other Indian

Chief and, whether my troops can be employed at present or not, I implore Your Imperial Majesty most earnestly, if the Empire is involved, to give me an opportunity for that personal military service which is the highest ambition of a Rathore Rajput Chief and to be graciously pleased to command me to at once proceed to the Front in Europe.

I should esteem it the highest honour possible to serve during the War on Your Imperial Majesty's Staff but am ready to go anywhere in any capacity for the privilege of serving my Emperor in war as I have endeavoured to serve him in peace during the last twelve years.

As the opportunity is one of a life-time I humbly beseech Your Imperial Majesty not to leave me here inactive if the Forces of the Empire are engaged, for the duty of a Rathore Chief calls me to fighting service.

I have made complete arrangements for administration of my State in my absence and I am ready to sail immediately.

I am telegraphing to the Viceroy officially offering the services of self and troops.

GANGA SINGH.

His Majesty replied in warm terms of appreciation and promised to consider the Maharaja's request for personal service at the proper time. To the Viceroy the Maharaja wired as follows, making an appeal to be allowed an opportunity of personal military service:

To—

His Excellency the Viceroy  
Viceroy's Camp—India.

I and my troops are ready and prepared to go at once to any place, either in Europe, or India, or wherever our services might be usefully employed in interests of safety, honour and welfare of our Sovereign and his Dominions.

Your Excellency knows the traditions of the Rathore Bika Rajputs. We long to be early at the Front.

But whether my troops can be used at present or not, I would earnestly ask your Excellency at least to give me myself an opportunity for that personal military service of the King-

Emperor and the Empire, which is my highest ambition as a Rathore Chief and as a member of His Imperial Majesty's staff.

Complete arrangements have been made for administration of State in absence and can leave immediately.

Maharaja of Bikaner.

Not satisfied with this offer of personal service and of his own troops, the Maharaja addressed to Lord Hardinge a formal *kharita* on the 9th of August in which he offered 'to raise a special emergency Imperial Service contingent in his State, in addition to the troops already serving, for any duty under His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief it may be thought fit for'. The Maharaja added:

'I have often wished that it were possible for us to have maintained a larger body of Imperial Service Troops, but unfortunately the resources of the State do not permit of this as a permanent arrangement. It seems clear however that in the present emergency the State is certainly capable of doing something in addition, and that at comparatively little cost, since it is not pay that my military subjects look for but honour and faithful service. We realise of course that the standing forces of the Crown are sufficient by themselves, but it is our bounden duty, in allegiance to the Sovereign, to seek the honour of a burden which represents the fullest of our possibilities.

'It is this that forms the basis of my offer.

.....  
'It may perhaps be thought that if such a force could be raised in this way the men might enlist or be drafted into regular regiments of the Indian Army. With regard to this I can only repeat what I said in 1904, namely that although in ordinary circumstances comparatively few men care to enlist for military service, particularly outside the State, thousands under the leaders of their own clans and communities are ready enough in a time of real emergency to respond to the call of their Ruler to fight for the King-Emperor and for the honour

and good name of their State and Maharaja. So long as they formed a corps with an individuality of its own as a Bikaner Contingent their local patriotism would be stimulated and there would be no difficulty about recruitment, but if this point is kept in view, it makes no difference how they are utilised provided they contribute actively towards the main object.

‘We are prepared to make ourselves responsible for any number of arms which the Government of India may be willing to entrust to the keeping of the State, and, for the training of the men or the custody of the arms, to agree to any conditions that may be considered necessary. To encourage enlistment the training could be done in the State, preferably, but not necessarily, with the assistance of two or more British officers if the Government of India would favour us by lending them, though, provided the identity of the corps as a Bikaner Contingent were not affected and the men remained in contact with their own territorial leaders, they could when raised at once be handed over to the military authorities to be trained. As however this is not a case of ordinary enrolment but of a voluntary levee *en masse* of the military classes of my State, it would, to ensure success and to avoid delay, undoubtedly be best that they should not be drafted out of the State except as complete Regiments or other units. I am confident that a body of men so raised would become efficient shots with comparatively little practice, for, as the Inspector-General of the Imperial Service Troops will be able to inform Your Excellency, the Bikaner men have a natural aptitude for musketry.

‘I have only to add that, if Your Excellency approves of my proposal, the State of Bikaner is ready and anxious to give practical effect to it immediately. In the event, which I hope is probable, of my being permitted to join the Army in the field, the members of the State Council, who would carry on the administration in my absence, particularly Raja Hari Singh of Mahajan, Raja Jeoraj Singh of Reri and Thakur Hari Singh of Sattasar (Military Member), would be able to deal with the scheme. In any case, I am taking steps to raise a separate smaller force of some 3,000 men to garrison the outlying districts of the State, and to give confidence in the rich towns in my territory, which are a special object of cupidity to the



surrounding populations owing to the fact that they are the homes of a very large proportion of the wealthy Marwari merchants of Calcutta, Bombay and other parts of India. These men, whenever normal conditions are disturbed, return to their homes, as they are now doing in considerable numbers, bringing large amounts of specie with them. This subsidiary force will also, I hope, be regarded as of some assistance to the Imperial authorities, since, although we should never think of troubling the Government of India by a call to our assistance save in the most exceptional circumstances, it would relieve them to a certain extent under section II of the Treaty of 1818 by which they undertook to protect "the principality and territory of the State of Bikaner". It might moreover, if necessary, serve the Government of India in a more direct manner, for, if the tranquillity of this part of India were assured, the force could, in any Imperial emergency, be placed at once at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. Its value would be immeasurably increased if modern arms or even breech-loading rifles of an old pattern and ammunition could be allowed for its training. Apart from arms we can however make our own arrangements for the instruction of a comparatively small body like this, and the assistance of British officers would not necessarily be required.'

The Maharaja's warm-hearted offer met with immediate response. The Bikaner Camel Corps proceeded to the Front and the Maharaja was himself attached to the Headquarters Staff of the 7th Division of the Indian Army under orders for France.

Those were indeed days of great activity in Bikaner. *Rana Banka Rathore*—Rathores gallant in war—is the old and true description of the Maharaja's clan and the opportunity for serving in such a war is what every Rathore desires in his heart. At the parade of the Bikaner troops on the eve of the departure of the Camel Corps on active service on the 25th of August 1914, the Maharaja addressed them in words that stirred the heart of every true Rajput.

‘These indeed are great days’, he said, ‘for us Rajputs and for the matter of that for all other soldiers too! Such an opportunity presents itself but rarely. It gratifies our life dream and ambition as Rajputs, as indeed it must that of all loyal supporters of our Emperor and his Throne. I am sure I am echoing the sentiments of all my soldiers and of all my subjects when I thank God most devoutly for the part that He has given us in this War and for the honour which the Emperor has done us by graciously accepting our humble service. We have enjoyed many favours from His Imperial Majesty and his Government out here in times of peace, and when we hear the trumpet sound of war, we are, I know, all agreed that our place is not at home to sit in ease and luxury, but on the field of battle—there, for the honour and glory of our Emperor and for the defence of his great Empire, to take our full share of responsibility and danger, shoulder to shoulder with our comrades of the British Army.’

‘I fully sympathise with you, my regiments who are left behind, but you must bear up patiently and loyally, as some day sooner or later your turn will surely come, and I would ask you to believe that in so great a war, you who stay in reserve at Bikaner are also rendering service both to the British Empire and your State.’

And he concluded in the following words:

‘Ganga Risala! I am very sorry I shall not be with you as your leader in this war. A few days ago when writing on the subject I stated that my place was with my Troops, but I have now been posted to the Head-Quarters Staff of the 7th Division of His Imperial Majesty’s Indian Army, and I know you will be glad to hear of this appointment.

‘I hope and trust we shall be in the same Division and thus not far apart; but however our duty may separate us, I know that the Ganga Risala will give as good an account of itself as it did in China and Somaliland.

‘Remember, my brave men, what our traditions are! We came to Bikaner as fighting men. Soldiers we were; and soldiers we have ever since remained. We fought for the British in the

time of the great Mutiny. We have fought for them in China and Somaliland. Now we go to fight again; and may God, and Sri Karniji, our Protectress, bless and preserve you; may you render meritorious services to the King-Emperor and return home safe and victorious!

The Maharaja's one disappointment was that he was not given the opportunity of serving with and at the head of his own troops. But as the distinction of serving at the Front had itself come to few he had nothing to complain of. His departure for Europe was delayed on account of the presence in Indian waters of the redoubtable German cruiser *Emden*. Never since the time of Bailli de Suffren had the Indian coast-line been subjected to enemy attack. The mere presence of the *Emden* and the apparent ease with which she appeared at the most unexpected places created almost a panic in India. British officials awoke from their complacency. The Maharaja, who had reached Karachi, had therefore impatiently to await events there in the heat of August for over two weeks. The naval escort in Indian water was limited; the presence of the *Emden* added an element of danger to the transportation of the Indian Army and as a result the Maharaja was able to reach France only in October.

His Highness was first appointed on the Head-Quarters Staff of the Meerut Division. It was with that force that he had sailed. Till the beginning of December the Maharaja was mostly at Locon near Bethune. When His Majesty King George visited that front he was pleased to command that His Highness should be appointed to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, afterwards the Earl of Ypres. There he remained till the end of January. It may freely be confessed that much as the Maharaja appreciated the honour of these appointments, his warlike spirit was in no way happy to remain at head-quarters when fighting was in progress. To so proud a spirit, anxious to rival the records of his great

ancestors who had fought at the head of Imperial troops and won victories for their sovereigns, service on the staff was a source of intense disappointment. But the British Government, fully alive to the changed conditions of modern warfare and to their responsibility in exposing an Indian sovereign prince to the dangers of a modern war, would on no condition post him to front line duty.

On one question he was, however, insistent and unyielding. He would not allow his exalted rank and high position to come in the way of whatever he had to do in his post. He insisted on being treated exactly as others similarly placed and on sharing their hardships and difficulties. He would not allow things to be made easy for him. This characteristic of His Highness elicited spontaneous tributes from all the officers with whom the Maharaja served, especially from General Sir Charles Anderson in command of the Meerut division, who wrote that in sending His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner to his staff they had sent a 'kindly, simple, self-effacing English gentleman'. More than once in his letters the Maharaja expressed his regret<sup>1</sup> 'that owing to the nature of warfare there was so little to do for people like myself on the Staff'. But the Maharaja took everything seriously. What there was to do he did with characteristic thoroughness and Sir James Willcocks who commanded the Indian forces wrote :

'Both you and I can fairly say that we saw the Great War in its most trying days. No boarded trenches then: we had to fight in the mud and slush, and trench warfare was then in its infancy. Things have altered now. It is the Germans who have to look to it more than we. I always recall your good work in those terrible days: never afraid of mud or discomfort or anything else, you showed a fine spirit, Maharaja, worthy of your great name and race.'

The Maharaja's work and example were greatly appreciated and he was mentioned in dispatches. He looked

<sup>1</sup> Letter to General Willcocks, 29th March 1916.

forward in time to greater activity at the Front, but news reached him from home which made his return to India imperative. His daughter was reported by doctors to be suffering from consumption. Early in January 1915 the Maharaja received alarming reports about the state of the Princess's health. The doctor who was in charge of her declared her condition to be very serious. He was therefore obliged to return; but not before he was enabled to take part in the campaign in Egypt, during the fortnight he stayed there on his way back. This incident, which is so characteristic of the Maharaja and of his anxiety to see active service, is worthy of detailed record.

Before leaving England the Maharaja asked Lord Kitchener to appoint him to the staff of General Maxwell who commanded in Egypt, and said he hoped that he would see something of the Turkish Army which was known to be advancing towards the Canal. Kitchener, while appointing the Maharaja to the staff of General Maxwell to enable him to see his own Camel Corps which was in service in Egypt, ridiculed the idea of Turks reaching the Canal in time for the Maharaja to see anything of them. On arrival at Port Said on the 29th of January 1915, where information reached him that his daughter was better, the Maharaja heard that the Turkish Army was actually approaching the Canal, and instead of reporting himself in person at Head-Quarters in Cairo he applied to and received permission from General Maxwell to serve at the head of his own troops, which were then stationed at the Ferry Post at Ismailia. Sir John Maxwell, in reply to His Highness's request, wrote as follows :

'You have decided to do exactly what I would have wished you to do.

'I regret very much to hear of the cause that brought you to Egypt but what is a loss to the army in Flanders is a gain to the army in Egypt.'

The Maharaja's object, as he wrote to General Maxwell, was 'to see as much fighting as possible' and in this he was fortunate. One day when out at the head of a small detachment of troops the Maharaja came upon a large concentration of the enemy in the neighbourhood of Katib el Khel. In the encounter which resulted the Maharaja himself took part, firing nineteen rounds from his own rifle. On the 21st of February the Turkish Army had to retreat, and the Maharaja at the head of the Ganga Risala took part day by day in the pursuit of the enemy.

After the defeat and retreat of the Turks from the Canal area the Maharaja returned to India. He was extremely unhappy because of the illness of his elder daughter, whose condition had become worse in the meantime and because of the feeling that while fighting was going on elsewhere he, a Rathore Rajput and a Maharaja of Bikaner, was not in the thick of it. There was also the fear that uncharitable critics would not fail to comment on his return. One rather prominent friend of the Maharaja had in fact given out that the Maharaja was malingering and that the alleged illness of the Princess was only an excuse; and this kind of insinuation, most poisonous because it is only whispered, pained the Maharaja greatly. In many a letter written to high Army officers like Sir Douglas (later Earl) Haig, the Commander-in-Chief, and Sir James Willcocks, he bewails the misfortune that kept him in India and expresses the fear that others might misunderstand his remaining at home. His daughter's illness ended fatally and his own health was none too good at the time. But the Maharaja again approached the Viceroy for permission to return to the Front. In spite of the Maharaja's persuasiveness Lord Hardinge remained adamant. He would not agree to the Maharaja's going off again to France.

'Much as I admire and appreciate your desire to return to

the scene of conflict,' wrote the Viceroy, 'I have come to the conclusion that in the interests of India and of your State, it is your Highness' duty to remain in this country. You have, in my opinion, already done your duty to the Empire by your presence at the Front for several months, where your services obtained the approbation of the Commander-in-Chief. Under present conditions I see no need for your Highness to return to France and I consider that your services may be more usefully employed in India.

'Further,' the Viceroy added, 'although I have absolutely no apprehension whatever as to the internal or external security of India in the immediate future, I cannot help feeling that it will be in the interests of my successor that, during the first few months after his assumption of office, there should be in India all those upon whom he could absolutely rely for help or advice, should a moment of difficulty arise. As it is a great pleasure to me to regard Your Highness as one of this category I am sure you will not take it amiss from me if I say that I would prefer that you should remain in India, and am thus unable to accede to your request.'

This was indeed final. There was now no question of proceeding again immediately to France. On grounds of public duty the Maharaja was requested to stay on in India. Though greatly disappointed at this decision the Maharaja recognized the justice of the Viceroy's point of view. The problem of Indian man-power in the different theatres of war was becoming serious. The demand of Indian politicians for political recognition of India's changing status was becoming more insistent; a new Viceroy was about to take charge and Lord Hardinge was justly entitled to say that he could not afford to let the Maharaja, whose wisdom in council had come to be recognized by all, go back to France. The Maharaja was in the circumstances forced to reconcile himself to the inevitable. In communicating to Sir James Willcocks the possibility that he might not be permitted to return to France he took the opportunity to recommend strongly that Maharaja Ranjit

Singhji, the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, should be appointed in his place. The Maharaja wrote:<sup>1</sup>

‘Might I however suggest the name of the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar—Ranji the great cricketer of old—who is at the front with the Cavalry and is one of the big Ruling Princes from Bombay. . . .’

To Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief, the Maharaja explained the position in detail:

‘When I left France my intention was to return as soon as possible and Lord French had very kindly promised to take me back on his staff. But the doctors absolutely forbade my returning last summer and I accordingly sent to General Lambton a medical certificate signed by Lt.-Col. Sir James Roberts (Surgeon to the Viceroy). The doctors would not also permit me to return for another winter campaign.

‘Although I am still not quite fit, I am thankful to say I am much better. I felt it my duty to offer to return to the Front this spring. From the enclosed copy of a letter from the Viceroy you will, however, notice that he has decided that I should not return. Of course it is a disappointment in some ways, as I should much like to have had the honour of serving under you and probably the second half of the war will in some ways be more exciting and interesting. At the same time, not being a fraud, I cannot pretend: the nature of the warfare permitted neither of my doing nor seeing much or of taking part in the fighting.’

Sir Douglas replied saying that he was ‘well aware of the excellent work you did here during several months of very trying warfare’, but agreed with the Viceroy that the Maharaja’s presence in India ‘at the present time is very necessary both in the interests of the Empire and as a help and support of the new Viceroy’.

This enforced retirement of the Maharaja from the War was of the highest political importance both to India and to the States. The Maharaja, though only thirty-six,

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 16th March, 1916.



had achieved a unique position in the Councils of the Empire. His political acumen and wisdom had been fully recognized by Lord Hardinge, who depended a great deal on his advice. The Maharaja's own experiences in Europe had given him a more comprehensive outlook. He had in fact grown greatly in stature. Even under the shadow of domestic tragedy and of impaired health, he applied himself to the political questions which he considered important from the point of view of the States. Just before the War broke out the Maharaja, as stated earlier, had taken up the question of the organization of a Council of Princes. The minute of 1914 brought the problem seriously before the Viceroy. The idea matured in the mind of His Highness while on active service and on his return to India he took the matter up again. This time the Maharaja decided to approach the question from a different point of view. The magnificent loyalty of the Princes and their unique services had brought their great importance to the Empire prominently to attention. Besides there was a warm-hearted response from the highest authorities of the Empire to the historic outburst of loyalty from the princes and people of India. Every one recognized that the record of India and her princes was such as justly to entitle them to claim their due place in the British Commonwealth. Nor was there any longer the fear that to raise fundamental issues regarding the princes would bring down on them the sinister charge of sedition and discontent. Rulers who had themselves waded through the slush and mud of France and fought in the scorching sun of Egypt, whose soldiers were on active service on the different fronts, and who had poured out the wealth of their States into the war-chest, could not be accused of disloyalty or unfriendliness. In 1915, therefore, the Maharaja could well take up the whole question of the status, dignity, and privileges of the princes and deal with it in a frank and open manner. This problem had already been raised by him in the

minute of 1914. The charge therefore would not legitimately lie that the crisis arising from the War was being exploited by the princes for their own aggrandizement. What the Maharaja desired was not aggrandizement but justice and rectification of abuses which had crept in. He took in hand therefore the preparation of an elaborate minute in which he set out to show how the authority and dignity of the Indian rulers had been encroached upon by officialdom in India; how, in spite of repeated assurances by the sovereigns of England that the rights, dignities, and honour of the Princes of India would be respected as their own, the practices and usages of the Foreign and Political Department had in the course of half a century reduced the position of the princes; how the phraseology used towards them had undergone modification, to the extent of denying even the use of the word 'Princes' in relation to themselves; how in *kharīṭas* and other official documents a subtle change had been introduced with the intention of reducing their position and status; how by slow degrees new rules of precedence were evolved to put them on a lower plane compared with the officers of the Government of India; how, in short, through a gradual process of encroachment the *izzat* and dignity of the rulers of Indian States, representatives of ancient kingdoms and dynasties and allies of His Majesty, had been lowered *vis-à-vis* the Government of India.

The minute began with an allusion to the changed conditions in the Empire as a result of the War; with the conviction that when the War is over

'there must come enhanced sympathy and goodwill and therefore more intelligent co-ordination between the centre and the peripheries in consequence of the honourable and proud part played by the various countries and peoples owing common allegiance to the Sovereign. . . .

'India too wants and confidently hopes that she will receive her due share . . . and the great and important order of the

Ruling Princes and Chiefs of India, though not technically a part of British India proper, yet by virtue of enjoying the protection of His Imperial Majesty and yielding to none—Britishers, Indians or Colonials—in devotion and veneration and loyalty and attachment to their beloved Emperor, may reasonably entertain the hope that their difficulties and anxieties will be seriously examined and dispelled.’

It is in this spirit that the Maharaja put forward his proposals.

After pointing out the historical importance of the Indian States to the Imperial polity of Britain and the sovereign character of the States, the Maharaja alluded to the difficulties which the rulers had so far felt in bringing their troubles before the representatives of the Crown :

‘The position of Ruling Princes and Chiefs in regard to such matters is a very delicate one. Their sense of loyalty to the Government of India and their natural reluctance “to blow their own trumpets” do not render it easy for them to broach the subject. On the other hand it is unquestionable that there is a considerable amount of anxiety and general feeling amongst their ranks in respect of certain questions concerning their *izzat* and privileges, though this feeling may not be freely voiced by all through nervousness or kindred reasons. Within the last four years there has been, to my knowledge, some talk of a formal representation being made touching the diminution of our dignity and privileges, and I have with my own eyes seen Princes, whose loyalty to the Emperor is beyond dispute, deeply affected and even in tears, when speaking on the subject. As nothing in the nature of agitation on the part of such a community as ours was considered either becoming or advisable, some of us suggested that in the first instance informal representation and personal discussions would be preferable. And it is gratifying to see that these counsels prevailed. If nothing is said to get matters put right, we stand in danger of losing our rights and privileges. Now with the daily growth of social intercourse the question has become acute. In this intensely practical age the process of levelling has gone on

all round. All fine distinctions tend to become obliterated and greater contact has bred unceremoniousness. In all official intercourse the greatest attention to the minutest details of ceremonial procedure is rightly paid both by Government and our States. Whilst, therefore, we for our part are particular to pay in the strictest form the courtesies and honours due to others, we not unnaturally expect the same in return. Speaking for my State, when the disputed cases of ceremonials, referred to above, arose, it was gratifying to note that not a single instance could be quoted in which we had departed from past practice in such matters, and I expect the same will be found to apply to most, if not all, other States. But punctiliousness on our part as to forms is held by some to be synonymous with narrowness and "bad form", and the claiming of any such rights has even been termed as "truculent" by Mr. Lovat Fraser!

"The official standpoint from which the position of the States and their rulers has been viewed of late, has, it is submitted, not always been historical or in strict accordance with actual past practice and usage and treaty engagements. Whilst some of the existing conditions may be the outcome of incorrect notions of Imperialism entertained by certain officials, true Imperialism as a matter of fact has no greater advocates than the Ruling Princes themselves, who are proud of their position in the great British Empire, and who will do anything for their gracious Emperor. Our view of the matter, however, is that this question has not consistently been treated from the standpoint of true Imperialism which would seem to demand the most liberal and generous treatment of the Ruling Princes and Chiefs, so that with a place again accorded to them in India consistent with history and tradition, the term "Empire" would acquire a real significance which, it is respectfully submitted, it cannot otherwise be said fully to possess in India to-day. To an outsider, it would almost appear as if this official view had lost sight of a fact which I may be permitted to state here with all modesty, namely, that it is His Imperial Majesty the King of England and Emperor of India who, alone of all sovereigns in the whole world, has under him great Princes of such ancient and noble line; and that the higher the position and honour assigned to them, the greater the lustre

and glory of the Empire. Already in the British Empire, there is a King of Uganda, and recently Egypt, with its newly created Sultan, has come under His Imperial Majesty's protection, without Imperial prestige and interests being jeopardized in any way. The degree of consideration and honour paid to other potentates in other parts of the British Empire appears from all accounts to be marked. Formerly the Ruling Princes and Chiefs of India also enjoyed similar honour in India—which they still have the privilege of enjoying in England, the heart of the Empire—without any prejudicial effects to the Empire. It cannot be contended by our worst enemies that the Indian Princes and Chiefs of former times were more loyal than we of the present generation are, and that we are thus not deserving of the honours, usage and terms irrefutably applied by the officers of Government themselves to our forefathers, or that such honours and usage in the past resulted in our ancestors' turning disloyal after the Mutiny.

'Matters', the Maharaja emphasized, 'would now appear to have come to such a pass that the Ruling Princes and Chiefs stand in need of all the help and support which His Excellency the Viceroy may be pleased to give them. The Princes and Chiefs have invariably deserved well of the Government. Their solid loyalty and devotion to their Empire during the present War also speaks for itself. By restoring them to their former high place in the Empire, compatible with their position as allies acting in subordinate co-operation with the British Government, with their ancient lineage, traditions, and history, and with the fact that Native India rules over at least one-third of this great country and over one-fourth of its entire population, no Imperial principles will be violated or adversely affected; and the graceful acceptance and generous recognition of their not unjust claims, at this opportune moment, will remove disabilities which to them have been extremely discouraging and disheartening, and under which they are indisputably labouring at the present moment. From the Imperial as well as from every other standpoint some action appears to be imperative and urgently necessary, and I feel that it can be safely asserted that there is a universal hope and expectation that His Excellency Lord Hardinge, during his extended term of Viceroyalty, will

be pleased to get something effective done, which will make the Ruling Princes and Chiefs as happy and contented as they are loyal to their Emperor.'

If the case the Maharaja made out on general grounds was unanswerable, the details he furnished on which he depended to bring home his arguments, were beyond doubt weighty. Buttressed by numerous authoritative statements from official documents, he proved that on the question of precedence the position of the Rulers had suffered progressive deterioration as a result of the desire of officialdom to aggrandize itself.

On all the other questions such as ceremonial phraseology, attention paid to the honour and dignity of rulers, courtesies to sons and heirs, &c., the Maharaja was able to establish his point no less conclusively. On questions of policy like the administration of States and the education of princes during their minority, the Maharaja offered criticism based largely on his own personal experience and the knowledge he had gained of the conditions in neighbouring States.

The proposals which the Maharaja put forward in order to remedy these conditions were moderate and statesman-like. He suggested that one or more committees, as might appear desirable, should be convened in December or January to deal with such points as might be referred to them.

'... The convening, also at an early date, of a conference, apart from committees, is absolutely necessary for the consideration, in all their various aspects, and settlement of such points as directly concern only the Government of India in the Political Department and the rulers, their States, and their people. Whilst giving universal satisfaction, and being the only way of arriving at satisfactory conclusions, a conference will also give the rulers of States an opportunity of frankly putting their difficulties before Government in this informal manner which cannot but be productive

of the greatest good. It is, however, essential that the Princes and Chiefs invited to sit on such committees and conference should be fully representative of their Order, and the selections should inspire general confidence. The Conference need only be of an informal nature, its proceedings and deliberations being strictly confidential and not communicated to the Press; and any other necessary safeguards may be imposed. If His Excellency the Viceroy could spare the time to open the conference or to visit it again at any special time, the honour would be much appreciated and that would be all the more encouraging. Given the fullest and freest discussion in a friendly manner, and provided, as we are confident, the official attitude is one of sympathy, nothing will be so helpful in solving any difficult problems and giving a general feeling of assurance to all concerned as a round table conference.'

The Maharaja further urged that the Council of Princes which he had proposed in 1914 should be called into being. 'The War', he added, 'has afforded a suitable opportunity for the scheme to be put into effect in a definite and practical form. The rulers and peoples of Indian States feel that they are not appealing in vain and that at least one of their most cherished ambitions will be fulfilled before long.'

In this important Minute, we have the origin of the Princes' Conferences which later on became the Chamber of Princes. Lord Hardinge, to whom the Maharaja personally took this Note, was impressed by its arguments and gave due consideration to his proposals. The representatives of the Crown have always stood above the petty ways of officialdom and have generally been anxious to secure to the Princes their just rights and privileges. The fact was that these matters had seldom reached the Viceroy. No one among the princes was desirous of displeasing the Political Department. But times had changed, and the Maharaja felt that even the most prejudiced political officers would hesitate to level charges of disloyalty against any ruler who had

personally served at the front and whose troops were in the thick of the fight overseas in the interests of the Empire.

Besides, Lord Hardinge was an exceptional Viceroy. As a *diplomate de carrière*, he was both a civil servant and one who at the same time had a just appreciation of political values. Departmental officials could not overawe a civil servant who had lived all his life among files and dispatch-boxes. At the same time, being a diplomat of international experience, he was able to see in the right proportion political events which officials were apt to lose sight of altogether.

The minute of the Maharaja with its elaborate documentation convinced the Viceroy of the seriousness of the position. The minor complaints voiced in it were immediately set right. The distinction between Ruling Princes and Ruling Chiefs was recognized, and the title of Prince began to appear once again in official phraseology. Towards the larger issue of a permanent machinery for consulting the princes, the Viceroy was equally sympathetic. Events in British India had made it an immediate necessity, and it is to these events that we must now turn in order to follow the sudden development in princely and Imperial problems which India witnessed in the next few years.

The seditious movement for the suppression of which Lord Minto had requested the co-operation of the princes had become quiescent with the imprisonment of Tilak, the banishment of Arobindo Ghose, and the stern action against the terrorists. The Minto-Morley reforms had also created a cleavage in the Congress, the more moderate elements under Sir Phirozeshah Mehta and Mr. Gokhale having expressed themselves satisfied with that instalment of reforms. The Congress organization came under their control. The appointment of distinguished Moderate



leaders like Sir S. P. (later Lord) Sinha and Mr. V. Krishnaswamy Aiyar to the Executive Councils changed the aspect of Indian government. Lord Hardinge's sympathetic attitude towards the national movement and the re-unification of Bengal had also a quietening effect. Generally, in 1914, political agitation in India was sober and moderate.

But the first year of the War witnessed a definite change. Early in 1914 Mrs. Annie Besant made her entry into Indian Nationalist politics. She started her Home Rule movement in Madras. Mr. Tilak, who had been devoting his great talents during his imprisonment in Burma to the composition of a philosophic masterpiece on the message and metaphysics of the Gita, was also liberated just before the War, after the expiry of his term in jail. Most unfortunately both Mr. Gokhale and Sir Phirozeshah Mehta, the two outstanding Liberal statesmen, died in close succession in the early days of the War. Deprived of their prestige and influence, political agitation in India swung violently to the left, and the Home Rule movement, whose slogan was the immediate attainment of Swaraj and the establishment of an Indian commonwealth on the lines of the Dominion constitutions, gained much ground.

Apart from the personality of its leaders, there were undoubtedly other causes for the great appeal which this movement made to political India. British statesmen had announced from a thousand platforms that the Great War was being fought to safeguard liberty and 'to make the world safe for democracy'. India was proud to be associated in this great work of liberation, and her soldiers were fighting on three continents to maintain the rights of weak nations against aggression. Surely, it was argued, the liberators were themselves entitled to greater freedom in their own land. To ask for Home Rule would not be sedition, especially when it could be pointed out that the nations which enjoyed Home Rule in the British

Commonwealth had remained staunch and loyal in the hour of her trial.

There was also widespread economic discontent following the rise in prices of all imported commodities and the fall in prices of all country produce. This distress was exploited by the politicians. For the first time, political movement in India showed signs of becoming a mass movement. The unrivalled organizing capacity of Mrs. Besant and the popular appeal of Mr. Tilak made the Home Rule movement a power in the land. While the Government took effective steps to put down the revolutionary terrorists who had again begun to show signs of widespread activity, they could not put down a constitutional movement for Home Rule. The result was that political India was greatly agitated and pressure began to be exerted by the moderate groups for some effective measure of political reforms.

Very few Indian rulers realized the significance of these developments. Isolated in their States and without wide political vision the majority of them could not appreciate the powerful currents that were flowing below the placid surface of India's life. But some of the more far-sighted, and among them the Maharaja, were not slow to awake to the possibilities of the movements in British India. As genuine Indian patriots they sympathized with the demand for a greater status for India in the Empire. They realized that the time was past when India could be governed as a conquered country, and they made no secret of their opinion that the War and India's part in it made radical changes necessary in order to strengthen the ties between India and the Empire.

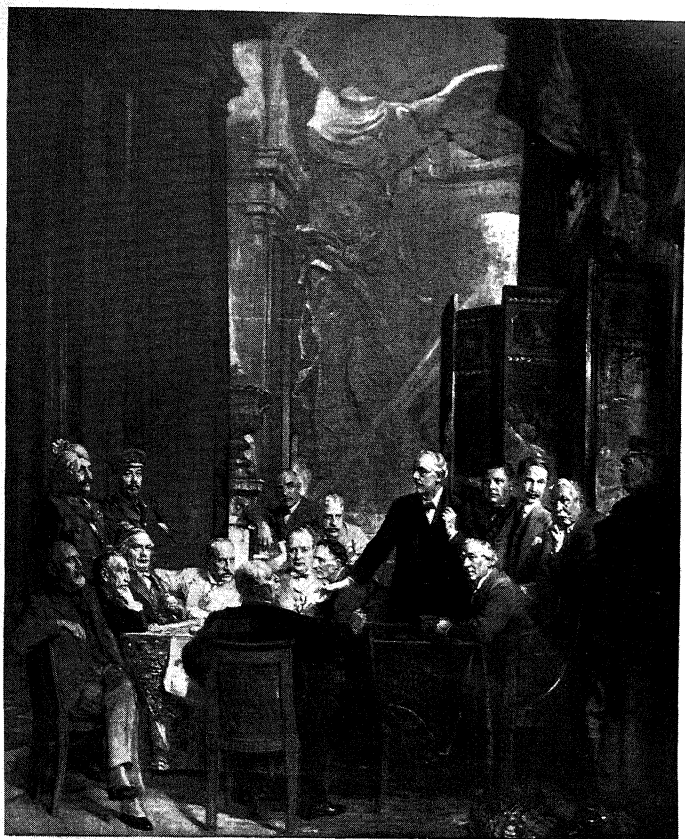
But the Maharaja also realized that while reforms in British India were inevitable they would mean a further deterioration in the position of the Indian States unless along with such reforms suitable steps were taken to strengthen the position of the rulers and to secure for

them, on the one hand greater freedom of action within the States, and on the other a proper voice and influence in the affairs common to them and to India. The proposals put forward by the Maharaja in his minute for the rectification of the practice on matters affecting the prestige of the rulers, and for the establishment of a Council of Princes, were in truth parts of this great conception, by which the Maharaja hoped that the two parts of India would advance together to a common goal.

Lord Hardinge was not slow to realize the importance of an organization of princes, both as a counterpoise to the more extreme demands of British India and as providing a suitable machinery for constant consultation between the two parts of India. He therefore took immediate action, and the first regular Conference of Princes was summoned to meet in Delhi in the winter of 1916.

The Conference was a great assemblage of Princes. Among the princes who attended were the Rulers of Baroda, Gwalior, Kashmir, Bhopal, Kolhapur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Patiala. The work of this and the succeeding conferences is dealt with later; but this much may be said here: that after the first Conference the Viceroy was convinced of the usefulness of such an organization not only for consultation in times of emergency but as a normal machinery of co-operation between British India and the Indian States. The Maharaja, as the prime mover in the organization of the Conference, was not only prominent in its deliberations, but was entrusted by his brother Princes with the secretarial work of the Conference as honorary general secretary.

His Majesty's Government decided early in 1916 that the conduct of the War required closer association between the Dominions and the mother country, and an Imperial Conference was summoned to meet in London. The British Indian political leaders thought that the time was ripe to make an effective demand for the inclusion of



*Some Statesmen of the Great War*

*Presented to the National Portrait Gallery by Sir The Bailey Bart. K.C. M.G.*

*Painted by Sir James Guthrie. P.R.S.A.*

*Left to right standing: Sir Maharajah of Bikaner, India, General Botha, S. Africa, Mr. G. A. Barnes, Sir R. Borden, Canada, Lord Ralston, Sir Eric Geddes, Mr. Benar-Liu, Lord Morris, Newfoundland, Lord Kitchener, Seated at table: Sir J. Cook, Australia, Mr. W. M. Hughes, Australia, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Milner, Mr. W. M. Massey, New Zealand, Mr. Winston Churchill, Lord Grey, Lord Oxford & Asquith.*



India in the Imperial Conference, in view especially of her great help in the conduct of the War. A resolution to this effect in the Imperial Legislative Council of India had been moved as early as September 1915 by Sir Mohammed Shafi and accepted by the Government of India. When, therefore, the Conference was summoned in 1917, His Majesty's Government invited three representatives to be associated with the Secretary of State for India as India's spokesmen at the Conference.

Though the Maharaja was only a young man of thirty-seven at the time, his record both in his own State as a Ruler, as a representative of the Princes of India who was ever active in their interests, as an ally of the Crown whose friendship had been tested in the field of war, was such that he was clearly marked out as one of India's representatives. Lord Chelmsford in inviting him to attend the Conference wrote as follows :

Viceroy's Camp, India.  
The 11th/12th January, 1917.

My dear Maharaja,

I am writing to ask whether you will be willing to assist at the Imperial War Conference which is going to be held in London at the end of next month. I hope sincerely that you will find yourself able to accept. It is of the very greatest importance that there should be a representative of the Princes, who have contributed so generously in personal services and men and money to the cause of the Empire. Please keep this entirely to yourself, and if you find yourself able to accept, will you telegraph the 'Yes' without any allusion to the subject? The names of the representatives will be published when the Secretary of State gives me leave.

I understand that the sittings of the Conference will take from two to three weeks.

Very sincerely yours,  
(Signed) Chelmsford.

The Maharaja knew that he was going to London not only as the Ruler of Bikaner, or even as the representative

of the Princes of India, but as spokesman of his mother country. A new note comes into his speeches from that time. At the banquet given by the Princes in his honour at Bombay on the 7th of February prior to his departure for London, he spoke for the first time publicly not only as the Ruler of a great State, but as an Indian statesman. Addressing the assembled princes His Highness said: 'Whether we come from the territories of British India or those of the Indian States, we are all Indians, who are entirely united in loyalty and attachment to our King-Emperor, in our affection for our mother country, and in our deep and genuine solicitude for our brethren of all creeds and communities throughout India.' He voiced the deep sympathy of the princes 'for the legitimate aspirations of our brother Indians in British India'. Not only did he express sympathy but he took the bold and for a Ruling Prince the unprecedented step of effectively pleading in public for greater reforms in British India.

'India has made', the Maharaja said, 'great strides politically in the past few years. A survey of the times before the war and during the recent Viceroyalties reveals much more progressive views and liberal tendencies. Now India, under God's providence, has stood the fiery ordeal and test without flinching and has unhesitatingly demonstrated to the whole world that whatever differences there may have been at times they were purely domestic and internal and of the nature of a family quarrel—to be settled only between the elder and younger members of the family. India, the daughter State, has proved that she would, as of old, always faithfully stand by England through thick and thin for the honour and glory of the mighty British Empire, of which she considers herself an integral part. After the end of this terrible world-wide war who can doubt that the angle of vision as regards India will be still further altered in favour of every reasonable and ripe political reform? Close personal comradeship on the battlefields and the common bond of loyalty for the Sovereign and love for the Empire have furthermore led to a similar favourable change in the angle of vision

of the self-governing Colonies and the other parts of the British Dominions, which, for the first time, are beginning to realize and understand India at her true worth. Big changes are in the air, including the reconstruction and reconstitution of our Empire, and though at present the immediate energies of all of us must be devoted to winning the war, yet when, by God's infinite grace, the arms of His Imperial Majesty the King-Emperor and those of our brave Allies are crowned with victory—an event which happily is already in sight—I sincerely believe that British statesmanship and the British sense of justice and fairness will prove equal to the occasion and accord to our country that place to which her position in the Empire and her loyal services to the Crown entitle her. We may, therefore, confidently assume that Great Britain and the British nation, who have so bravely made, and are still making, such tremendous sacrifices to uphold the cause of justice and humanity, will not forget the just claims and aspirations of India to enable her to work out her destiny under Britain's guiding hand and protection.'

This was indeed a note that had never been heard in India before—so long had it been complacently argued by British authorities in India that the demand for reforms was confined to the 'babus', to the intelligentsia, as they were contemptuously called. The princes were said to be greatly agitated about this demand, and the impression had been created that the rulers of Indian States were alarmed at the prospect of British Indian political freedom. Not only was this grossly unfair to the princes, but, as the Maharaja realized, dangerous to their future position, as it was likely to create hostility between British India and the States. But no prince had so far openly declared himself in favour of reforms for British India. For the first time the Ruler of a great State at a banquet presided over by a Governor and attended by many ruling princes had given unequivocal expression to nationalist and patriotic sentiments: had in no uncertain terms pleaded for 'the just claims and aspirations of India to enable her



to work out her destiny under Britain's guiding hand and protection'.

Political India gasped in surprise, but friends and foes alike realized that this open declaration in favour of reforms by a representative of the Ruling Princes selected by His Majesty's Government as the spokesman of princes at the Imperial War Conference and Cabinet, to a gathering of princes, had changed the complexion of the Indian political movement. Old-fashioned friends admonished the Maharaja on the boldness of the step: others hinted at the unwisdom of taking sides with agitators, but in British India itself the enthusiasm created by the speech was great. Nationalist newspapers hailed it as the dawn of a new era when Princes and peasants would work together for the greater glory of India. And so in a sense it was. The Maharaja's speech at Bombay was the beginning of that political collaboration between British India and the Indian States which was to find its consummation in the establishment of the federal constitution of India twenty years later.

Blessed with the good wishes of the whole of India the Maharaja and his colleagues arrived in London near the end of February. Originally the Indian representatives were only to be advisers of the Secretary of State, who, in his dual capacity of a Minister of the Crown and a representative of India, sat as a member of the Conference. There was some doubt as to the position which India should occupy at the Conference, as the Dominions felt that the political position of India as a dependency governed under the orders of Whitehall did not entitle her to full membership. But the British Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, who was fully aware of the sacrifices of blood and treasure which India had ungrudgingly made at the call of the Empire, stood staunchly by the intentions of the Cabinet, and India was accorded the rights of full membership in what he himself had called the Executive Cabinet of the Empire.

As to the Maharaja's work in the first Imperial War Cabinet we have the testimony of Mr. Lloyd George himself. In his memoirs, the war-time premier says:

‘“Bikaner” as he was familiarly and affectionately called—the Indian Prince—was a magnificent specimen of manhood of his great country. We soon found that he was one of “the wise men that came from the East”. More and more did we come to rely on his advice, especially on all questions that affected India.’

Naturally, on an occasion like the session of the Imperial Conference, the Indian representatives were fêted and lionized in a most exceptional manner. The Maharaja received the freedom of the City of London, a doctorate of laws from Edinburgh University, and other marks of honour and appreciation from the British public. He took the opportunity of such public occasions to voice freely the claim of India. The Maharaja recognized that he was being honoured not only in his personal capacity as one of the great Ruling Princes of India, but as representing a country which had stood so staunchly loyal to the Empire in the time of crisis and had borne her part nobly in the epic struggle of the Great War. He therefore felt that in his representative capacity he was bound to make the voice of India heard in no unmistakable manner, and in every pronouncement, either at entertainments given in his honour or on ceremonial occasions, he placed prominently before the British public the claims of India for greater consideration. Here was a princely interpreter of the new life which was transforming India. At the Empire Parliamentary Association, in the presence of the Ministers of Great Britain and the Dominions and of the members of the British Parliament, the Maharaja made a most powerful appeal for a liberal measure of reforms for India. His Highness declared:

‘To revert, however, to India and her hopes in regard to the future, I think I can sum them up in a few sentences, and here

when I speak of India I refer both to British India and to the Indian States.

‘Our first and foremost consideration and constant care is at all times to render what little service we can to our Emperor and the Empire, for I hope it is hardly necessary for me to assure you that we are all deeply imbued with feelings of profound veneration and devoted attachment to our gracious Sovereign and his Throne. It is equally unnecessary for me to assure you that the welfare of the Empire, for loyal and patriotic reasons if also for motives of enlightened self-interest, is a matter of abiding interest and concern to us.

‘Subject always to these two essential qualifications and considerations which are ever uppermost in the mind of every thinking and loyal Indian (and they unquestionably form by far the overwhelming majority of our population) our aspiration is also to see our country under the guidance of Britain—and, as Mr. Chamberlain said, with the help of Great Britain—making substantial advance on constitutional lines in regard to matters political and economical, and ultimately attaining, under the standard of our King-Emperor, that freedom and autonomy which you in this country secured long ago for yourselves and which our more fortunate sister Dominions have also enjoyed for some time past.

‘On our loyalty to the Sovereign and of our genuine desire to contribute our utmost towards the well-being of the Empire it is not for me to dwell on this occasion. I must leave that to you and to the verdict of history, but I would venture with all modesty to express the hope that India and the Indians will not be found to have lagged behind in their efforts in the cause of the Empire.

‘As to our future aspirations, there are various matters of importance to us, such as a sound system of education, and industrial and economic development—still practically in its infancy in India—on which much could be said, but with the short time at our disposal I will confine myself to the political aspect, which it appears desirable in the interest of the Empire as a whole should be brought forward clearly and prominently.

‘My lords and gentlemen, is it matter for surprise that

India should be aiming at her political regeneration? You have given education on Western lines to Indians, and after centuries of close and intimate connexion with Great Britain—the land of liberal traditions and popular institutions—we Indians should be foolish if we did not see much that was good in your political life in this country. And we would be still more foolish if, after grasping the good points of your national life, we did not desire to have grafted or assimilated all that was good in your institutions and system, wherever and whenever our conditions permitted it.

‘Regarding India’s desire for ultimate self-government and autonomy within the British Empire, I am prepared to admit that it presents a difficult problem. But is the difficulty one that is insoluble by British statesmanship and British goodwill and sympathy, or are the existing conditions in India so hopelessly irreconcilable with Indian aspirations as to render the question merely academic, not worthy of serious thought, and fit to be relegated to the background, only to be brought out again in a dim and distant future? Certainly there is diversity of race. But does not even the United Kingdom consist of three different races? And is not Canada inhabited by, at least, as great a diversity of races and nationalities? And what about South Africa? And when talking of different races and customs as existing in India, we must bear in mind that India is not a country but really a vast continent; it is not a State but an empire within the Empire.

‘Then unfortunately we have unrest and sedition in India, though people at a distance not fully acquainted with the facts are apt in this connexion to get a somewhat erroneous impression. I know that it is not necessary for me to point out that so far as sedition is concerned, it is confined to an extremely small percentage of the vast population of India—to the extremists and to the anarchists. The millions of the Indian peoples are loyal to the core. The unrest that exists is of two kinds: that which the seditionists attempt to spread, happily with small response, has to be faced and is being faced and suitably tackled by the authorities. And it is our earnest hope in India that we may gradually be in a favourable position to eradicate it. It is a cancerous growth not peculiar to my country. The

other kind of unrest is what, if I mistake not, was so aptly described by a British statesman a few years ago as legitimate unrest. It originates from impatience at the pace, and the nature, of the political progress made in India. It is in the minds of people who, rightly or wrongly, hold these opinions, but who certainly are as loyal as you and I are. I decline to believe that British statesmanship will not be equal to the occasion, for it depends on the various complex and important Indian problems being handled with sympathy, with imagination, and with a generous and broad-minded perspicacity and boldness by the responsible Ministers of the Crown, whether or not such unrest dies out or continues. And it further is the considered opinion of many who have given thought to the subject, that if the people of India were given a greater voice and power in directions in which they have shown their fitness, we should hear much less of unrest, agitation and irresponsible criticism. Certain it is that despondency and desperation would give way to patience and fortitude, for India has confidence in the word and good faith of Great Britain. The enemies of order and good government would then be without the lever with which they at present attempt to swell their ranks and to spread sedition.

'You have doubtless heard of the "unchanging East" which

. . . bowed low beneath the blast,  
In patient deep disdain.  
She let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again.

'But I can assure you that India at least has been, and is, changing very rapidly and beyond conception, and that under the invigorating influence of Great Britain she is making truly remarkable and gratifying strides.

'No reasonable-minded person will contend that India is ripe at the present day for self-government in the full sense of the term, but there are many who think that there is room for further political reforms and advance. On the part of Indians we need patience, a due sense of responsibility, and above all concentration on that which is attainable. To you we look for sympathy, help, and readiness to recognize the

changes which are taking place in India and to help Indians to achieve further progress, and in due time to realize her cherished aspirations. We are confident that these questions will be considered in time and in such a manner as to permit of something being done at the conclusion of the war—not as the price of the loyalty of India, for no one knows better than she that she can only realize her object within the great British Empire and with the sympathetic aid and assistance of the British people.

“There may be differences as to the nature of India’s demands, but there can be no difference as to their being perfectly reasonable and legitimate; and here I should like with your permission to read an extract from a speech made at Manchester only yesterday by my distinguished colleague, Sir James Meston, who holds the high position of Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces. Speaking of the demands and yearnings of India, he said:

“Its ideals at least are not unworthy. They are precisely the ideals which you yourselves have followed through the centuries and which you are now securing.

“If wisely guided, this spirit will vivify India’s pride in our Empire, her affection for England and that firm and unbargaining loyalty, which . . . is the proudest tradition of all that is best in India.”

“Perhaps I might mention here, in case it be thought by anybody that the States will be alarmed at and resent political advance made in British India, that we of the Indian States—and I speak for the Ruling Princes no less than our subjects—would rejoice at such progress, for after our concern for the Empire our greatest anxiety is to see our country progressing and prospering and our fellow countrymen in India receiving what is their due. To show you that I am not speaking in an irresponsible manner, I would point out that at least 10 per cent., so far as I remember, of the important States already have representative institutions. Every year some States are being given representative government on generous and constitutional lines, and this shows that though we are autocrats we attempt not only to march with the times but also to do our duty towards our States and people.

‘And what can I say to-day in regard to that part of India, a third in area and one-fourth of its entire population consisting of the Indian States, the more important of which are under the direct government of the Ruling Princes and the other States under that of the Ruling Chiefs? Though not technically forming part of British India, we are proud of our unique position within the British Empire, having come under the suzerainty of the King-Emperor and in political relations with the British Government by the treaties and engagements to which I have already briefly alluded; and I venture to assert that we yield to no one, not only in British India but in the whole world, in our loyalty and attachment to the King-Emperor. And as allies and friends no one has the best interests of the British Government more at heart.’

One of the points on which His Highness laid great stress in all his speeches in England was the voluntary character of the association of India and England and the inevitable necessity arising from the nature of that association to evolve in gradual stages from dependence to equality. In a speech at the Guildhall on the occasion of receiving the Freedom of the City of London, the Maharaja emphasized this point:

‘We are not of the same kith and kin with you, but India is attached to Great Britain and to the Empire, and they to her, by very real and strong ties. In the last three years these have been cemented and consecrated with the blood of your sons and brothers, and of ours, in this titanic struggle. Out of the crucible of common danger and of mutual sacrifice you and we will emerge with a closer and better comprehension of one another, linking us in stronger bonds of understanding, brotherhood, and affection than were ever dreamt of by our ancestors on either side. Those who still say that India is held by the sword do a grave injustice to both countries. I should be sorry, and I feel sure you would all be sorry, to hold so narrow a view. No; British rule in India rests on much firmer foundations than force. It is based on the principles of justice and equity, humanity and fair play. The most wondrous jewel

of the British Crown is held through the loyalty and devotion of the people of my country, through the deep-rooted affection and gratitude of hundreds of millions of loyal and grateful hearts. In the process of constructive and healthy evolution it is inevitable that differences of opinion should at times arise, but these at worst are no more than a family quarrel to be settled between the parent country and younger members of the Imperial household.'

Again, in an interview to *The Times* of the 13th of May 1917, the Maharaja stated as follows:

'In endorsing these remarks, I would say that the advances to be made should be conceived with the breadth and generosity of view that has marked British policy in so many other parts of the world, and which, so far as I can recall the history of her colonial expansion, she has never had occasion to repent. Sentiment counts for a very great deal in India, and the changes made should be of a character to strike the imagination. The old saying that he gives twice who gives quickly applies with singular felicity to the constitutional reforms recently stated by the Viceroy to have been submitted by the Government of India to the Secretary of State for consideration. Excessive caution would be an error almost as great as the acceptance of rash and ill-considered proposals. Some further steps in the internal political evolution of India would seem to be not merely a desirable but an essential corollary of the momentous decision that India, with the self-governing Dominions, is to be regularly consulted in peace as in war, at the Imperial Conferences and Cabinets which Lord Curzon has announced it is proposed to convene annually. I do not wish to minimize the immense difficulties ahead in the adaptation of Indian internal affairs to the changed conditions, but they are not insoluble, and should not deter British and Indian statesmen from marching along the road of ordered development.

'There can be no more mistaken view than that the Indian Princes will look with disfavour or apprehension upon these political developments. On the contrary, they will rejoice to see India politically progressing on constitutional lines under



the British flag. Whilst every State has preferred to be free to conduct its internal affairs in ways best suited to local circumstances, peculiarities, traditions, and sentiments, and whilst they have different ideals and different standards of administrative efficiency, many of them are making rapid progress in the association of the people in the work of administration and legislation.

'In my own territories we inaugurated some years ago the beginnings of a representative assembly. It now consists of elected as well as of nominated non-official members, and their legislative powers follow the lines of those laid down for the legislatures of British India in the 1909 reforms. In respect to the Budget they have the same powers as those conferred on the supreme and provincial legislatures in British India by the Lansdowne reforms in force from 1893 to 1909. When announcing my intention of creating this representative body I intimated that as the people showed their fitness they would be entrusted with more powers. Accordingly, at the end of the first triennial term, when the elections will take place, we are revising the rules of business in the direction of greater liberality and of removing unnecessary restrictions.

'The fact is that there is identity of interests between the British Government and the States, and all that tends to the stability and popularity of the one tends to the stability and popularity of the other. Their future is bound up together and their mutual advancement will promote the welfare of the British Dominions as a whole. We are all members of one great Empire, the most beneficent mankind has seen, under the rule of our gracious King-Emperor.

'Certain misgivings entertained in India at one time as to some effects of Imperial reorganization must have been dissipated by the cabled reports of the welcome the Dominions statesmen extended to us, and of the conclusions unanimously reached by the Imperial Conference, and notably the acceptance of the principle of reciprocity of treatment in relation to the position of Indians in the Dominions. A new spirit towards India has been shown by the daughter nations as well as by the people of this country. Some differences of view may remain, but we shall agree to differ now that India, no longer able to

regard herself as the Cinderella of the Empire, takes a place at the council board. Trust begets trust, and India has to give as well as to receive. I am persuaded that she will cheerfully respond in peace, as in war, to the readjusted demands and sacrifices of Imperial citizenship, as readily as she enters upon its great privileges and noble opportunities.'

The importance of the Maharaja's advocacy of the cause of Indian freedom cannot be over-emphasized. The British public realized that 'agitation' in India was not to be equated with sedition as they had so long been inclined to think, but was the expression of a new vigour in national life which was justly entitled to their sympathy and support. Mr. (later Sir) Austen Chamberlain, the Conservative Secretary of State, was so greatly impressed by the Maharaja's views that he requested His Highness to send to him his detailed views on Indian reform. The Maharaja welcomed this opportunity and on the 15th of May forwarded to the Secretary of State for India from Rome just before sailing for India a detailed minute on the whole question. This note is important in two ways. It is the first official expression by a Ruling Prince to His Majesty's Government on the vital question of British Indian reforms. Secondly, the historic pronouncement of the 20th of August 1917, which changed the course of Indian political evolution, is not only anticipated in the minute, but is definitely traceable to it.

The Maharaja, after emphasizing how closely the destinies of Indian States and of British India are united, and how disturbed conditions in British India are bound to affect the States and their Governments, declared that, while in all matters affecting the stability of the British Government the Rulers of India are solid on its side,

'the welfare and steady political advance of India on constitutional lines is a matter of no small concern and importance to the Ruling Princes and Chiefs not only because as Indians they have the good of their country and their fellow

countrymen at heart, but because they feel that such a course would in itself popularize, strengthen and preserve British rule in India.'

He therefore urged, with all the emphasis at his command, that

'unless Indian problems—complex and difficult as they appear—are, at the golden opportunity which has now presented itself, handled in a sympathetic and generous spirit, and with imagination, broad-minded perspicacity, and above all with boldness by the responsible ministers of the Crown in the two countries, the results will obviously be as deplorable as they will be undesirable and unfair both for Great Britain and for India. If this golden opportunity is not properly and fully availed of, a deep-rooted and widespread feeling of disappointment and grievance, discontent and bitterness, will inevitably spread throughout the length and breadth of British India. The force of that feeling no man can at present properly gauge, but there can be no question that compared with it the recent unrest and discontent would appear to be a trifle.'

This was indeed frank speech. The Maharaja warned the Cabinet of undue optimism, emphasized how subversive movements would grow if timely acts of conciliation were not resorted to, and pointed out that 'extreme conservatism and excessive caution can produce as much harm as rash and precipitate action'. His suggestions to meet the situation were definite. He put forward what may be called a four-point programme.

'1. The extreme importance—indeed, the vital necessity—of a *formal* and *authoritative* official declaration being made by the *British Government* at the earliest possible opportunity to the effect that self-government within the British Empire is the ultimate object and goal of British rule in India.

'2. The advisability of inaugurating, on liberal and sympathetic lines, further political reforms in the constitution and function of the Provincial Legislative Councils as well as in the Imperial Legislative Council in British India.

'3. The desirability of greater autonomy being granted

to the Government of India as well as to Provincial Governments. . . .

‘4. The vital importance to the Indian States, their rulers and their subjects, of establishing at an early date on constitutional lines a council or assembly of Princes to deal with matters which concern the British Government on the one side and the States, their rulers and their people, on the other.’

The Maharaja emphasized the importance of an unequivocal declaration of British policy. He urged that ‘it will go a long way to dispel the uneasiness, impatience, disappointment, despondency, and despair at present so markedly noticeable; the rank of the extremists will be diminished; there will be something definite to guide the members of the public services’.

‘The whole question is’, the Maharaja added frankly, ‘whether or not this is the goal of British rule in India. I submit that there can be but one answer and that an emphatic “yes”. If the granting, when the right time comes, of self-government within the Empire is not the goal of British rule in India, then it is impossible to conceive what the goal is.’

The Maharaja dealt in detail with all possible objections to such a declaration. It had been widely suggested that the Indian Army would consider such a declaration in favour of self-government undesirable. The Maharaja, both as a soldier and as one who had direct experience of the Indian Army, dealt with the objection effectively.

‘I have also heard’, he said, ‘apprehension expressed as to the effect on the Indian Army of such a declaration being undesirable. Should this view really be held by any responsible officer, I would venture to state that whilst no such danger is at all perceptible to our Indian mind, on the other hand the fact should not be lost sight of that the classes from which the soldiers of our Indian Army are recruited do not all find employment in the Army alone. While some brothers will be in the Army, others may be following legal or even political careers, and they are all bound to exchange views and make

comparisons when they meet on furlough, &c. With education and Western ideas spreading over the country, Indians whether in the Army or in some civil employment, will all naturally desire to see their country materially advancing. If the bulk of the people are discontented and dejected and, in the absence of any such declaration, see no political future for their country, the discontent and unrest is sure gradually to spread to the Army as has happened in other countries before now. Thus any withholding of the declaration is far more likely at a future date to cause an undesirable effect on the Army than the issue of such a statement.'

After full consideration of all the arguments the Maharaja, with shrewd political insight, insisted that the declaration should be simply and clearly worded, without being hedged in with numerous narrow and petty restrictions and qualifications, should not be in the form of a new statement by a Secretary of State or other high official . . . but should have the stamp and weight of authority and formality in the shape of a royal proclamation or at least be made by His Majesty's Government in England under the authority of the King-Emperor.

For reforms in the Centre and in the Provinces the Maharaja argued with equal force. 'No reforms', he stated with emphasis, 'leaving intact the Central Government would be acceptable to India.' The covering letter addressed to Mr. Austen Chamberlain brought these points home to the Secretary of State for India.

My dear Mr. Chamberlain,

Rome. 15th May, 1917.

I enclose the minute you were good enough to ask me to write about some important Indian questions.

I regret I could not hand it over to you before leaving England but the rush, as you know, was very great and I have only just finished it to-day. I have appended a note to it apologizing for its length and the poor paper and ink, but it has not been an easy matter dictating it and having it typed during this trying journey, and I had to get the paper etc., here.

I hope, however, that it has enabled me to put before you the strong view I honestly hold of the very serious situation that is likely to be created in India in certain eventualities. The questions, I am convinced, will receive your earnest, and, all India will hope, favourable consideration, but in the interests of the Empire, as well as of India, I would beg leave once again to urge and implore you to do something on a really liberal, sympathetic and generous scale and in such a manner as will strike the imagination and sentiments of the East and bind India and England closer together. Liberality, sympathy and bold statesmanship have always paid in the past, and if England will rise fully to the occasion in her future handling of Indian affairs I am firmly convinced she will never have any cause for regretting her policy and action.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Ganga Singh.

The Rome note is in many ways a document of crucial importance. It emphasized the vital points of the Indian demands: an unequivocal declaration of policy on behalf of His Majesty or his Government, defining the goal of British rule in India; provincial autonomy; increased powers for the Central Legislature, and a Council of Princes. Speaking not only as a great Ruling Prince, but as an Imperial statesman, loyal to the Crown and alive to his responsibilities, the Maharaja claimed these for India as the minimum which would satisfy the legitimate aspirations of her people. When, owing to the Mesopotamian troubles, Mr. Austen Chamberlain had to resign almost immediately after the Maharaja had sent his note, His Highness wrote privately to his successor, Mr. Edwin Montagu, calling attention to the document and appealing to him to give effect to the recommendations.

The historic Declaration (20th of August 1917), when actually made, was found to follow closely the lines which the Maharaja had urged. It read as follows:

‘The policy of His Majesty’s Government, with which the

Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible . . . .’

A comparison between the Maharaja’s note and the declaration of Mr. Montagu goes to show that, whoever else may have suggested the wording, the entire scheme of the declaration follows closely the lines laid down in the Maharaja’s note. Others have claimed to have influenced, and no doubt did influence, the momentous decision taken by His Majesty’s Government, but the Maharaja of Bikaner can justly lay claim not only to have originated the idea but to have worked out the details which were embodied in the declaration which so changed the course of Indian history.

The work of the Maharaja was so greatly appreciated by the British Government that the Viceroy pressed him again in April 1918 to accept nomination to the Imperial Conference. Lord Chelmsford wrote:

‘The next sessions of the Imperial War Conference will be held in June next, and, though I know that Your Highness has put forward reasons connected with your State for not wishing to leave India again this year, I feel very strongly that the ideal arrangement would be for Your Highness and Sir S. Sinha to go again. I am therefore inviting you to do so in the full assurance that you will not refuse without giving the matter your very grave consideration.

‘Your Highness has the advantage of entering the inner circle of the Empire’s Councils with previous experience and knowledge. You already enjoy the confidence of and acquaintance with the men on the spot, and in the interests of your order I think it very important that Your Highness should be the first to establish the status of the Princes’ representative in

the new conditions which must in the nature of the case be somewhat vaguely defined at the outset. I imagine that this is a consideration which Your Highness will be very ready to appreciate and to which you will give due weight in coming to a decision.'

The Maharaja while appreciating the importance of the offer made by the British Government was unable, on public and personal grounds, to accept this invitation, and telegraphed to the Viceroy:

'Your Excellency will realize my great difficulties, willing as I always am to meet Your Excellency's wishes in every way and Your Excellency will agree that I am not failing in my duty to my Emperor or brother princes when I say with great regret that I should be most grateful if Your Excellency could kindly excuse me this time.'

On his return to India, the Maharaja took up the organization of the Princes' Council. He was aware that the question of reforms for British India would soon be taken in hand and threw himself with earnestness into the problem of safeguarding the rights of the States. When it was known that the Secretary of State was coming out to India for an inquiry into the political conditions and in order to elaborate the scheme of reforms, the Maharaja realized that the question had assumed urgency and that the slow-moving machinery of negotiation among princes would become a source of grave danger. It was obvious that, unless the princes put forward definite proposals both for the rectification of various abuses which had crept into their relations with the Government of India and for an organization to safeguard their rights, along with the advancement of political freedom in British India, their case would not, in the turmoil of British-Indian agitation, receive full consideration. His Highness therefore took the initiative in inviting a number of leading princes and ministers, together with distinguished political leaders from British India, for a conference at



Bikaner. Among those who attended were the Maharajas of Gwalior, Patiala, Alwar, and Nawanagar, who were elected to form a committee by their brother princes, and ministers of the standing of Sir M. Visweswaraya, Sir Manubhai Mehta, Colonel Haksar, and Sir Daya Kishen Kaul. The details of their work and the outcome of their discussions will be discussed in a later chapter.

## Chapter Nine

### PEACE CONFERENCE

ON the 11th of November 1918 the announcement was made that an Armistice had been concluded between the Allied and Central Powers. The four years of slaughter had suddenly come to a close. As India had taken a leading part in the War and had been admitted to the War Councils of the Empire, she was justly entitled to share in the making of peace, and that was the decision of His Majesty's Government. On the 15th of November His Highness received the following telegram from the Viceroy requesting him to proceed immediately to England:

'As result of communications between myself and London I am now in a position to ask Your Highness to proceed to England at once. It is absolutely essential that Your Highness should secure accommodation on the *Chindwara*, sailing on 23rd instant from Bombay. Sinha leaves by *Chindwara*. That boat and special arrangements for accelerated transit in later stages of journey will be provided. Your Highness will be gratified to learn that Prime Minister himself expressed a wish that you should go to London now. Precise method in which Your Highness' services will be asked has not as yet been defined but I know Your Highness will understand the impossibility of getting matters clearly cut at the present juncture in the present stress. Please accept my warmest congratulations and my very best wishes. Please acknowledge by telegram receipt of this message. If it is in any way possible for Your Highness to come to Delhi before starting I should of course be delighted. Political Secretary would give any assistance possible in regard to passage.'

The fact that the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, had himself asked that the Maharaja should be selected, serves to show the impression that he had made on the War Cabinet.

The Maharaja, along with his old colleague Sir S. P. Sinha, booked his passage on the *Chindwara*; its departure was delayed, and the Maharaja and party left by H.M.S. *Dufferin*. The enforced inactivity of the voyage was utilized by the Maharaja in writing a detailed note on the proposals of the Montagu-Chelmsford report relating to the formation of the Chamber of Princes, which will be discussed in its proper place.

The Maharaja arrived in London in the middle of the excitement of the 'khaki election'. At all times, the period of a general election is a political hiatus. Everything has to wait till the verdict of the country is known. The election following a decisive victory was naturally a demonstrative outburst of emotion. The Maharaja, who had hurried all the way from India in the expectation that there was urgent work waiting for him, found that in London he had nothing to do for several weeks. When the 'khaki election' was over Mr. Lloyd George and his Coalition Cabinet came back with a majority such as no government had previously enjoyed.

The first matter with which the Imperial Cabinet had to deal was a visit to England by President Wilson. The President of the United States had, as a matter of courtesy, been invited to visit London. The only time that the President could spare for this visit was during the Christmas holidays. The Imperial Cabinet was in two minds. They knew that Their Majesties the King and Queen, who had had a most strenuous time during the War, were anxious to spend a quiet family Christmas at Sandringham. They were equally anxious that the President of the United States should be accorded the courtesy of a ceremonial reception in London. The Maharaja spoke out his mind in the Cabinet and strongly urged that Mr. Wilson should be requested to put off his visit to a more convenient time. In this he was supported by Mr. W. H. Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, who warned his

colleagues in his shrill voice and with much thumping of the table of the dangers of hitching the British lion to the chariot-wheel of President Wilson. His Majesty, however, removed the difficulty by agreeing to forgo his Christmas holidays, and President Wilson paid his visit to London.

This visit was the occasion of another extraordinary experience for the Maharaja. President Wilson, as the head of the great State which was associated with the Empire in the War, was received with all due pomp and ceremony at Victoria station. Their Majesties and the members of the royal family, together with the Cabinet, were present to receive him. The Maharaja was also there, standing just behind his Majesty. The President, on alighting from the carriage, bowed neither to the King nor even to the Queen, but shook hands stiffly with a bare 'How-do-you-do?' The Maharaja was greatly shocked by this discourtesy and quietly fell back, as he did not desire to be introduced to the President. But a member of the royal family saw His Highness disappearing behind the palms and called His Majesty's attention to it. The Maharaja had no option but to be introduced to the President, but Mr. Wilson received more than he gave on that occasion.

On the 1st of January 1919 the Maharaja received the following document investing him with full powers from the King-Emperor as one of the plenipotentiaries for the Conference.

(Sd) George R.I.

George, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India &c., &c., &c., To all and singular to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting!

Whereas for the better treating of and arranging certain matters which are now in discussion, or which may come into

discussion, between Us and other Powers and States in connexion with the forthcoming Peace Congress We have judged it expedient to invest a fit person with Full Power to conduct the said discussion on Our Part in respect of Our Empire of India, Know ye, therefore, that We, reposing especial Trust and Confidence in the Wisdom, Loyalty, Diligence and Circumspection of Our Most Trusty and Well-beloved His Highness Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh Bahadur, Maharaja of Bikaner, Knight Grand Commander of Our Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, Knight Grand Commander of Our Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, Knight Commander of Our Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Honorary Major-General in Our Army, one of Our Aides-de-Camp, &c., &c., have named, made, constituted and appointed, as we do by these Presents name, make, constitute and appoint him Our Undoubted Commissioner, Procurator, and Plenipotentiary, in respect of Our Empire of India, Giving to him all manner of Power and Authority to treat, adjust, and conclude with such Ministers, Commissioners or Plenipotentiaries as may be vested with similar Power and Authority on the part of any Powers or States as aforesaid any Treaties, Conventions, or Agreements that may tend to the attainment of the above-mentioned end, and to sign for Us, and in Our name in respect of Our Empire of India everything so agreed upon and concluded, and to do and transact all such other matters as may appertain thereto, in as ample manner and form, and with equal force and efficacy, as We ourselves could do, if personally present: Engaging and Promising, upon Our Royal Word, that whatever things shall be so transacted and concluded by Our said Commissioner, Procurator, and Plenipotentiary in respect of Our Empire of India shall, subject if necessary to Our Approval and Ratification, be agreed to, acknowledged and accepted by Us in the fullest manner, and that We will never suffer, either in the whole or in part, any person whatsoever to infringe the same, or act contrary thereto, as far as it lies in Our power.

In witness whereof We have caused the Great Seal of Our United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland to be affixed to these Presents, which We have signed with Our Royal Hand.

Given at Our Court of St. James, the first day of January in the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Nineteen and in the Ninth Year of Our Reign.

Great Seal.

Along with the rest of the British Empire delegation, the Maharaja left for Paris and took up his abode at the Hôtel Majestique. At the Peace Conference India had three representatives: the Secretary of State (Mr. Edwin Montagu), the Maharaja, and Lord Sinha. In the actual work of the Conference the delegates had but little part. The direction of the Conference was in the hands of the 'Big Four': M. Clemenceau, President Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George, and Signor Orlando. But Mr. Lloyd George never failed to consult the British Empire delegation, and in these conferences the Maharaja took his full share. The first question which faced the Indian delegation was the matter of the representation of India in the League of Nations. The fact that India was neither independent nor self-governing was urged even in the British Empire delegation against India's inclusion in the League. Against this view Lord Sinha had written a masterly note for the Secretary of State. The Maharaja supplemented this with a memorandum of his own, dated the 2nd of February 1919, in which he argued forcibly for the inclusion of India in the League. Lord Sinha had confined himself to the legal and constitutional aspect of the question. The Maharaja took up the political and general aspect of the same problem and stated:

'Lord Sinha has shown me his Memorandum of the 22nd January in which he urged that the position of India cannot be differentiated from that of the Dominions in the matter of representation on the League of Nations and I am in full agreement with what Lord Sinha has written.

'As Lord Sinha very forcibly pointed out, the question of internal autonomy is not the test to apply for membership of the proposed League. Nor has that test been mentioned in the

resolution of the Conference on the subject at the meeting that took place on the 25th January last, or in President Wilson's speech or those of others supporting the formation of the League. It is, therefore, not necessary for me to dwell further on this point. I propose, therefore, to make a few observations which appear to be of particular interest and importance to India in the light of the remarks contained in President Wilson's speech and the wording of the resolution on the subject dealt with by the full Conference.

'As the resolution clearly states that the League should be open to "*every civilized nation*" which can be relied on to promote its objects, I would beg to point out that on this ground alone the claim of India for inclusion in the League is unimpeachable. I will not enter into the details of her ancient civilization dating back thousands of years, but will simply invite attention to the underlined portions of the speech of Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State for India, in the House of Lords at the outbreak of the War, who, when alluding to the despatch of the Indian Troops to fight in France, said:

"It is perhaps even more striking, certainly no less gratifying, that those representing the various races in India, *races representing a civilization of almost untold antiquity, races which have been remarkable in arms, and the science of government*, that they should in so whole-hearted a manner rally round the British Government, most of all round the King-Emperor at such a moment as this. . . . We shall find our Army there re-inforced by soldiers, *high-souled men of first-rate training and representing an ancient civilization*, and we feel certain that if they are called upon they will give the best possible account of themselves, side by side with our British troops encountering the enemy."

'Lord Curzon in a speech at Hull in September 1914 said:

"The East was sending out civilized soldiers to save Europe from the modern Huns."

I would venture to urge with all the emphasis at my command that if the people of India with their ancient civilization were considered fit to fight in Europe and in the other theatres of War side by side with the other civilized nations of the world in the tragic drama which has recently been enacted, then on

the grounds of civilization and the still higher grounds of our common humanity there can be no just or cogent excuse to deny India her admission into the League where other civilized Nations are to be admitted.

‘The President of the United States of America in his speech stated that we were assembled to make the settlements rendered necessary by this War, and also to secure the peace of the world not only by the present settlements but by the arrangements to be made in the Conference for its maintenance. He laid stress on the fact that we were not representatives of governments but representatives of peoples and that it would not, therefore, suffice to satisfy governmental circles anywhere but that it was necessary that we should satisfy the opinion of mankind. He also reminded the Conference that the burdens of this War had fallen in an unusual degree upon the whole population of the countries involved; that the burden had been thrown back from the front upon older men, women, and children and upon the homes of the civilized world; and that the real strain of the War had come wherever the heart of humanity beats. A little further on he said that although the settlements might be temporary, the actions of the nations in the interests of peace and justice must be permanent. And in the same connexion he drew attention to the feeling on the subject when he remarked that the select classes of mankind were no longer the governors of mankind; but that the fortunes of mankind were now in the hands of the plain people of the whole world, and that if we satisfied them, we would justify not only their confidence but establish peace, but that if we failed to satisfy them no arrangements that we could make would either set up or steady the peace of the world.

‘My remarks in this memorandum are not intended so much for the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State—who, we are gratefully aware, have in more ways than one evinced their genuine sympathy for India—but have special reference to the hesitation that has apparently been exhibited in some other quarters as regards the inclusion of India in the League. On the very grounds advanced by President Wilson I would also submit that the exclusion of India from the League of Nations has no ethical, historical or political argument in its favour.



‘Where it is a question of securing the peace of the world and when it is realized that the Conference delegates are also representatives of the peoples and that it is essential to satisfy the opinion of mankind, the important fact must be borne in mind that *India represents one fifth of the entire human race.*

‘It is hardly necessary to refer here to India’s part in the War and to what, we are proud to feel, was her material contribution towards victory and the vindication of liberty, justice and right against brute force and arrogant militarism and ambitions of world-domination. But it must here be pointed out that the people of India also have borne, to a substantial extent, the burdens of this War together with the other parts of the world and that they too have largely shared in the sorrow, suffering and misery caused by the War. No scheme planned with a view to action by the peoples of the world to secure permanently the interests of peace and justice can possibly be complete without the inclusion of India. No scheme for satisfying the plain people of the whole world, evolved at this Peace Conference, either to “set up”, or “steady the peace of the world” can be complete if one-fifth of the population of the whole world is to be actually shut out of the League of Nations by any select classes or delegates at the Peace Conference, who, in President Wilson’s own words, are really here specially to represent the peoples of the world.

‘Lord Sinha in his note has shewn how India has been fully and ungrudgingly admitted by His Britannic Majesty’s Government to the inner councils of the Empire. India has also received special representation at the council table of the Peace Conference now being held. After having borne arms, together with the other civilized nations, in a common cause while civilization and freedom hung in the balance and after having actually entered the portals of the peace temple, which in itself is a League of Nations, is India to be told to walk out as now no longer belonging to the civilized nations of the world?

‘It is almost inconceivable that any of the other Powers should take up such an ungenerous and unjust attitude. We are certain that the British Government will never agree to the exclusion of India and are confident that if the Prime Minister

and the other plenipotentiaries of the British Empire take up a firm attitude to champion the just cause of India, opposition on the part of other nations, should there be any, will be speedily overcome and the League of Nations thereby made really representative of the civilized world and not of a part of it.'

At the meeting regarding the constitution of the League held on the 5th of February, this question came up for discussion, and Lord Robert Cecil, who represented the British Empire, accepted the decisions 'on the understanding that, as a matter of fact, India would, in any case, be included in the League of Nations by virtue of the signature of the Covenant by representatives of the British Empire and in view of the hope expressed by President Wilson that India would be a member of the League'. It was, however, found that in Article VII of the draft covenant provision had been made for the inclusion only of colonies enjoying full powers of self-government. At this critical time both Mr. Montagu and Lord Sinha were away in London in connexion with the Indian reforms. There was some danger that the whole question would be decided against India, as the constitution of the League was to come up before the full Conference almost immediately. The Maharaja wrote to Lord Robert Cecil on the 12th of February 1919, asking for definite information. The Conference actually took place on the 13th and Lord Robert Cecil replied as follows on the 14th:

'I have delayed answering your letter of February 12th as the question you raised was to come up at the meetings of the League of Nations Commission yesterday. When it came up I renewed my reservation in regard to India, and that reservation will be entered in the *procès-verbal*. The *procès-verbal* will also show that President Wilson repeated his statement that he understood that India would be a member of the League. The present wording of Article 7 is that "admission to the League shall be limited to fully self-governing countries

including dominions and colonies"—a wording which taken by itself might give rise to apprehension in regard to India. But the whole of this Article 7 with regard to admission is now confined to the case of States who are not signatories to the Covenant and not named in the protocol hereto as States to be invited to adhere to the Covenant. I have personally no doubt that India will be included as an original signatory, and the legal advice that I have taken on the subject supports me in this view. But even if an argument could be made against this view, it would still be open to us to demand the inclusion of India in the protocol, which is not yet drawn up, and I am quite sure that, especially in view of the support promised by President Wilson, no objection would be raised to this course.

I think, therefore, you may take it as quite clear that the case of India is satisfactorily covered.'

Mr. Montagu himself was very nervous, as will be evident from the following cablegram:

'I am a little disturbed on reading League of Nations Convention as to India's position and can only find comfort in the fact that you who were good enough to charge yourself personally with watching this matter have not communicated to me any anxiety. Would you see Lord Robert Cecil and Mr. Hurst and let me know whether India is all right and how its position has been safeguarded? Please telegraph in cipher for if there is any anxiety I must see Prime Minister before I return on Wednesday.'

The Maharaja's timely action had gained the day, and when Mr. Montagu was informed of the position he was the first to telegraph congratulations. On the 25th of April, at the plenary session of the Peace Conference which finally decided this question, India's name was expressly included amongst those of the original members of the League who are also signatories of the Treaty of Peace. The Maharaja had by his efforts, nobly seconded by Lord Sinha, secured for India an international status.

A more complicated problem faced the Indian delegation to the Peace Conference. The proposals which the

Allied Governments had put forward regarding the partition of Turkey had deeply disturbed the Indian Muslim community. It became increasingly clear as the Peace Conference progressed that the Allies were determined to partition the Ottoman Empire, deprive the Turk of his European possessions including Constantinople, and reduce Turkey to a vassal state and convert the Sultan-Khalif into a puppet potentate. The Indian Moham-medans were deeply stirred by these proposals. So early as the 1st of January 1919, a moderately worded memorial, in which the signatories pointed out the disastrous effects which such proposals would have on Muslim sentiment in India, signed by leading Indian Mussulmans resident in Europe, including His Highness the Aga Khan and the Right Honourable Syed Ameer Ali, had been submitted to the Foreign Secretary. But the Big Four which decided the policy had not heeded that warning. Mr. Lloyd George's pro-Hellene feelings and the commitments entered into in the Sykes-Picot agreement made any course of moderation difficult. In the meantime Muslim opinion in India had become greatly inflamed. The Hindu politicians under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi expressed their sympathy with the Muslims, and the Khalifate question—as the question of the treatment of Turks was called in India—had become a national problem. Both the Indian representatives at the Peace Conference were Hindus, but they could not remain deaf to the demands of their Muslim compatriots.

On the 20th of March the Maharaja received a long and detailed cablegram from Haji Chotani in which the demand was put forward that the full and independent control of the Holy Places of Islam should be left to the Sultan of Turkey as the Khalifa of the Prophet; that Constantinople must be left in the possession of the Sultan; that the peace treaty made should be of such a character as to effect complete reconciliation between

Muslims and the British Empire. As soon as the Maharaja received this communication he sent a copy of it to the Prime Minister and wrote to Mr. Montagu requesting approval for the issue of a public statement.

'I wish', said the Maharaja, 'it were possible for a public statement to be made authoritatively announcing to the Muslim world in India that you, Lord Sinha and I have constantly kept the Indian Muslim standpoint in view and that we have to the utmost of our ability and energy been pressing the Muslim case. In view of our all three being non-Muslims, I think it is only due to us that some such statement should be made.

'Subject to the approval of the Prime Minister and yourself, I propose to send the following telegram in reply to the President of the Mohammedan mass meeting in Bombay acknowledging his telegram:

"Your telegram of 20th March received first April. I have forwarded copies to Secretary of State and asked him to forward same to Prime Minister. I would assure you and other brother Indians of Muslim faith in India that Mr. Montagu, Lord Sinha and I have constantly kept Indian Muslim standpoint in view and that we have to the utmost of our energy and ability been pressing the Muslim case on Prime Minister and His Majesty's Government and I would beg you to believe that we give our constant and most earnest consideration to faithfully and strongly representing the true Mussulman sentiments regarding these important questions."

The Indian delegation took up this matter at the meeting of the British Empire delegation on the 3rd of April and both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State agreed that though it was unusual to reply to such telegrams from public meetings, in the exceptional circumstances of the present case a reply on the lines suggested might be issued. Mr. Montagu therefore sent a telegram to the Viceroy on the 7th of April 1919, pressing for the issue of a statement on the above lines and adding that

with the approval of the Secretary of State for India the Prime Minister had proposed that he and the Maharaja should have an opportunity of presenting the case before the supreme Allied authorities.

The Indian Government, however, did not agree about the necessity of issuing such a telegram.

The Indian delegation in the meantime had been faced with distressing realities. The British Empire delegation had appointed a committee to report on Greek territorial claims. Mr. Lloyd George was frankly pro-Hellene. He had inherited from Gladstone the policy of expelling the Turk bag and baggage from Europe. Under the magnetic influence of that most plausible of statesmen, M. Venizelos, and of his mysterious friend Sir Basil Zaharoff, the Prime Minister improved upon the Gladstonian tradition and was prepared to partition even Anatolia. The Greek Territorial Claims Committee naturally reported for the inclusion of Smyrna in the territories to be assigned to Greece. The Indian delegation was shocked by this proposal and did not hesitate to circulate a memorandum in which the case for the retention of Smyrna in Turkish hands was powerfully argued. They pointed out that Turkey was being treated in a harsher way than even Germany; that Mesopotamia, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, and Armenia were to be torn away from the Ottoman Empire, and that despite the Prime Minister's definite pledges the Turk was to be deprived of Constantinople also. The Greeks had put forward a claim to Smyrna and the British Empire delegation had strongly supported it. Even the United States delegation had expressed opposition to this proposal, which would have taken away from Turkey all her most important exits to the sea, leaving her in an economically helpless position. Ethnological considerations of doubtful value had been urged, but the Indian delegation pointed out that 'no argument based on these considerations

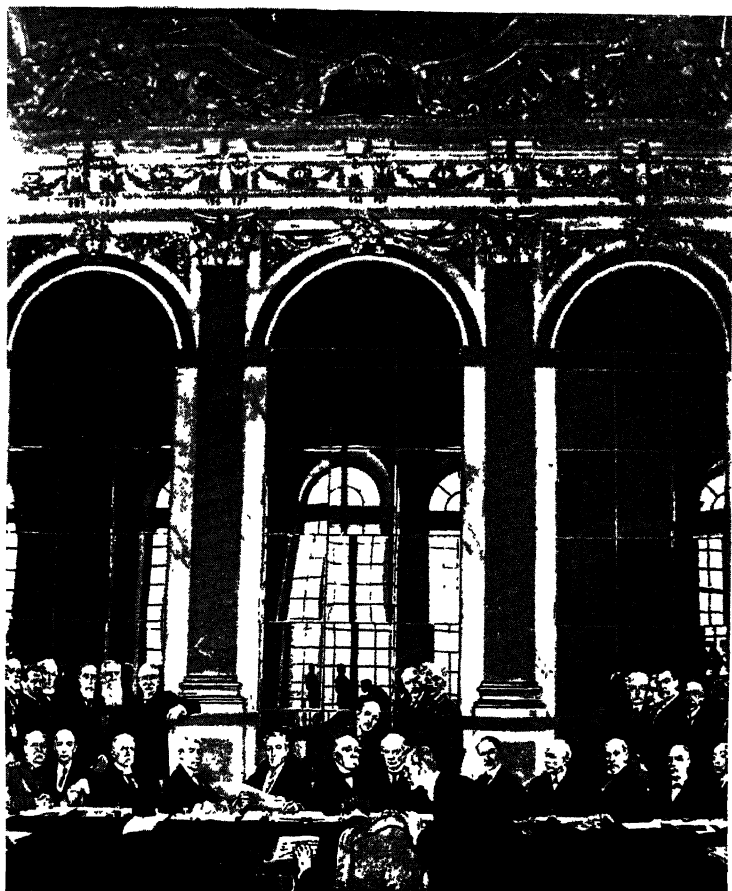
could give Smyrna to the Greeks without proving on analogous figures that Constantinople should remain with the Turks'. Their memorandum concluded with an energetic protest stating that the sort of peace proposed was not a peace to which the representatives of India could willingly assent; that the conviction was becoming rife that the British Empire with its large Muslim population 'was embarking on a campaign which was not merely anti-Turkish but anti-Mohammedan'.

The British Empire delegation led by the Prime Minister was too much committed to the Greeks for this protest to have any definite effect. But it is clear that if the Indian delegation's view had been heeded Greece would have been spared the disaster that overtook her three years later and Great Britain saved from the humiliation of withdrawing under threat of arms from her position on the Straits.

On only two other questions which came up before the Peace Conference did the Indian delegation take a special stand. The Japanese proposal for a declaration of racial equality naturally interested the Indian delegates. It met with very vigorous opposition from President Wilson; nor were the representatives of the British Empire in any way inclined to favour it. But in the Empire delegation the Indian representatives, knowing the galling restrictions based on race made against their countrymen not only in the colonies but in India itself, strongly supported the Japanese point of view. The brunt of this fight fell on Lord Sinha, but the Maharaja gave him staunch support in every possible manner.<sup>1</sup>

The proposal sponsored by President Wilson for the limitation of working hours for labourers was another question in which the Maharaja took a keen interest.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Harold Nicolson's statement in *Peacemaking* that the British Empire delegation opposed the Japanese proposal is strictly accurate; but it is not correct to argue from that statement that this opposition had support from the Indian delegation.



The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles,  
June 28, 1919

The Maharaja is standing at the right-hand pillar  
(*Sir William Orpen, R.A.*)





He knew that conditions in India did not permit of such radical changes, and at the plenary session, in supporting a reservation made by Lord Sinha in this matter, he demanded the exclusion of the Indian States from the scope of President Wilson's proposal. In doing so the Maharaja made an important announcement which has since been often repeated in the League of Nations.

'As the territories of the Ruling Princes lie outside British India and as legislation enacted for British India by the British Government cannot apply to Indian States, and as furthermore the only competent authority to legislate for an Indian State is the Government of the State concerned, it should be clearly understood, with reference to Article 19 of the draft convention, that the authority or authorities within whose competence the matter lies for the enactment of legislation or other action "shall be the constituted authorities of the various Indian States concerned".'

The public statement of this reservation on such a platform was of the utmost importance to the States, and the Maharaja by entering this timely reservation safeguarded in an effective manner the autonomy of the States for the future.

The Maharaja's close association with imperial and international statesmen at these conferences was important to him. He had worked in the closest intimacy with Mr. Montagu and Lord Sinha, and had been on friendly terms with Mr. Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and other great figures on the international stage. For Montagu and Sinha the Maharaja developed great personal affection. It was really for the first time that a great Ruling Prince had worked on terms of equality with a British Indian leader. At one time the princes generally were apt to look upon all British Indian politicians as seditionists of differing shades. But close contact with a statesman of the intellectual calibre of Lord Sinha, genuinely

patriotic but sane and sober in his views, a man of wide culture and charming personality, was bound to modify such prejudices. The Maharaja's extensive friendships with British Indian leaders and co-operation with them in the work of furthering the interests of India may be said to have been the outcome of his collaboration first with Mr. Gokhale and then with Lord Sinha.

The summer of 1919 witnessed the shaping of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. When the actual proposals were published strong opposition was organized by a group of British reactionaries under the leadership of Lord Sydenham. This group, calling itself the Indo-British Association, carried on a vigorous propaganda against India in the name of 'the interests of India'—more correctly the interests of British trade and of the Indian Civil Service. It did not hesitate to utilize every possible means to discredit the reforms scheme, and pour scorn on Lord Chelmsford, Mr. Montagu, and all others associated with the proposals. One of the methods which this Association freely used was to give out that the princes of India were opposed to all these reforms, and that the assurance of political freedom for British India amounted to a betrayal of the Allies of the Crown. It was alleged that the princes resented the appointment of Lord Sinha as Under Secretary of State. The same allegation had been made when he was appointed to the Government of India in 1909. The Maharaja, who had been watching these developments with concern, thought that the time had come when the attitude of the Princes should be clearly and unmistakably defined. Returning from Paris especially for the purpose, His Highness presided at a banquet given at the Savoy Hotel on the 7th of March 1919 to Lord Sinha by his English and Indian friends in London in honour of his appointment as Under Secretary of State for India. The Maharaja dealt vigorously with those ex-officials, who for their own

purpose had not hesitated to drag in the name of the princes of India against the claims of their country.

'We knew', said the Maharaja, 'some of our old Anglo-Indian friends too well to expect them to be in real sympathy with such a Declaration. And no reasonable person will for a moment cavil at honest differences of opinion. But what do we find? On the 30th of October, 1917,—several days before Mr. Montagu had reached India on the mission with which His Majesty's Government had specially entrusted him—the Indo-British Association held its inaugural meeting in London. The minutes of its proceedings were published under the surprising title of "The Interests of India". Perhaps it was chosen because one of the professed objects of the Association is, we are told "to promote and foster the unity and advancement of the Indian peoples". The methods, arguments, and manifold activities of the Association have, however, singularly disguised this avowed aim; and all that we can say is—save us from such friends.

'The Association does not expressly oppose the Declaration. But its real hostility to the policy of His Majesty's Government is revealed in almost every phase of its activity. From the first it has been developing a ceaseless pamphleteering and press propaganda. The booklets and leaflets it issues so freely are intended to alarm the ordinary man as to the condition of India, to belittle in every possible way the educated classes of that country (and indeed every one who has the temerity to disagree with its views), and to appeal to the personal and class interests, at one time of the working man, at another—and more frequently—of business firms participating in Indian trade. Such firms were asked by circular, intended to be private, but which found a publicity unwelcome to the authors, for subscriptions to the Association of any sums from £1,000 downwards. The suggestion was made in this begging letter that such subventions should be regarded as "*an insurance premium for business interests in India*". Now, we believe in an industrial as well as a political future for our country, but we have yet to learn that the Indian Empire exists for exploitation by any particular commercial interests.

As my right honourable friend, Mr. Chamberlain, publicly said when Secretary of State, India refuses to be regarded any longer in the economic sphere as a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water. But industrial development means increased purchasing power, and British trade stands to gain not to lose thereby.'

Coming to the question of the alleged opposition of the princes the Maharaja was even more emphatic.

'Finally', he declared, 'I must deal with an issue on which I claim a first-hand knowledge, at least not inferior to that of the Indo-British Association or even of vehement leader-writers in organs echoing its views. The impression has been very freely conveyed that the princes of India are hostile not only to Lord Sinha's appointment, but also to the reforms under contemplation. As one who has the honour to represent in England, for the second time, the princes of India, I feel it my bounden duty to give to this gross misrepresentation the most authoritative and emphatic denial.'

The tone of this speech, its frank and outspoken criticism of the reactionaries who had libelled India and the princes, and its earnest appeal in the cause of British Indian reforms were not without political repercussions in India. Even staunch and loyal friends could not understand how the Maharaja could have made such a speech. If those who had genuine affection for the Maharaja felt called on to protest, it can be imagined what wild insinuations were set afloat by the reactionary elements who found in the Maharaja such a sturdy opponent. It was whispered that he was disloyal, that at heart the Maharaja was a seditionist. These accusations had been whispered against him for some time past, but they came to a head after the speech at the Savoy Hotel. The Maharaja felt that he owed it not only to himself but to the princes generally to bring this kind of intrigue into the open, and in a note which he gave to the India Office he drew pointed attention to it.

‘Where so many princes have vied with one another, I cannot claim anything special for myself, but with the past record of my House and myself this much I venture to feel I can fairly claim, that is, that no prince in India can be inspired by greater loyalty or personal attachment to His Imperial Majesty. My intense surprise and pain can therefore be imagined when I found that I was also being represented as disloyal: and in fact even more so than others.’

During this visit to Europe His Highness was offered the degree of D.C.L. *honoris causa* by the University of Oxford, of which his old friend Lord Curzon was then the Chancellor. Though His Highness accepted it and agreed to attend the Encaenia on the 25th of June to receive this high academic distinction, he was unfortunately called away to the Peace Conference on that date and was therefore not able to be present to receive the degree.

The Maharaja returned to India in July and received a triumphant welcome at Bombay. The Viceroy sent a letter of congratulation on the great work of the Maharaja and practically every prince of importance wrote to him in terms of high appreciation. He had indeed deserved well of his country, and from princes, British officials, and Indians of all shades of opinion he received generous tributes to his work.

## *Chapter Ten*

### TOWARDS A CHAMBER OF PRINCES

THE Conference of Princes summoned in 1916 had an agenda which covered a variety of subjects, including such important matters as the ceremonial to be observed at the installation of a ruling prince, the form of minority administration, and the education and administrative training of minor princes. No such conference of princes of an All-India character had ever been held, and the experiment was viewed with apprehension in many quarters. But a large and representative gathering of princes met at Delhi. The Viceroy, opening the Conference on the 30th of October, declared that while princes and chiefs had gathered many a time in the past, in pomp and circumstance, to celebrate some splendid moment in the history of the Empire, it was only recently that the idea had developed of meeting without formality or ceremonial to deliberate on matters affecting the States generally and to assist the Government of India in the solution of important problems of administration. Lord Chelmsford also took the opportunity of defining more precisely the scope of the Conference and its meaning.

‘With regard to this Conference, then let me say,’ said the Viceroy, ‘Your Highnesses have been invited to meet together to-day to advise the Government of India on certain matters concerning yourselves, your States, and your people. There have been so many rumours with regard to the scope and meaning of this Conference that I think it well to define them in clear and unmistakable terms. There are questions constantly arising in respect of your States, your people, and yourselves on which the Government of India would like your free and frank advice.’

Neither the Viceroy nor the Political Secretary had any idea as to what attitude the princes would take on

the questions placed before them. The policy of isolation had been considered fundamental for so long a time that a collective discussion of matters vitally affecting the position of the princes was beyond the imagination of the ordinary official. The attitude the princes took and the strength they showed on important matters came therefore as a revelation.

The moving spirits of the Conference, besides the Maharaja, who had been elected general secretary by a unanimous vote, were the Maharaja Madhava Rao Scindia of Gwalior, the Maharaja of Patiala, the Maharaja Ranjitsinghji of Nawanagar, and the Maharaja Jey Singhji of Alwar. On the very first question of the agenda, both the lack of imagination of Sir John Wood, then Political Secretary, and the strong feeling of the princes became equally evident. The Political Secretary had circulated an explanatory memorandum on the ceremonial at installation durbars. It began with the statement that 'every succession requires the approval and sanction of Government'. There is neither historical nor legal justification for such a claim, for while the right of deciding disputed succession undoubtedly rests with the paramount power, the right claimed in respect of undisputed succession from father to son, or in accordance with the law of the State, was never accepted by the princes. The acceptance of such a claim would have rendered the position of the hereditary rulers of Indian States analogous to that of the nominated chiefs in Africa, and would have denied the hereditary character of their succession and made it dependent on the caprice of a department. For rulers claiming succession to their thrones and States from father to son for generations, such a claim, put down in such explicit terms on paper, seemed an outrageous encroachment on their rights. Feeling the strength of this opinion among his brother princes the Maharaja suggested to Sir John Wood that he would



probably like to explain the wording of the memorandum. But this opportunity which the Maharaja gave for the Political Secretary to withdraw gracefully from an untenable position was not taken. Sir John Wood made the position even worse by saying that while he had heard that some of the princes were not prepared to accept the statement that every succession required the approval and sanction of the Government, he had personally always 'regarded it as one of the political axioms of the Government of India'.

The Maharaja, along with his brother princes, demurred strongly to this view, and he followed the Political Secretary with a statement which clearly analysed the position.

'As regards succession, paragraph I of the Government of India draft memorandum states that every succession requires "the approval" and "sanction" of the Government of India, while paragraph II states that it is essential that such approval and sanction should be announced in a formal installation durbar by a representative of the British Government. The principle enunciated appears to be non-existent in the past and as such could not operate without stultifying not only the time-honoured and established principle of inheritance by right of birth and blood but also the solemn promises made in the past and especially in Queen Victoria's Proclamation. It leaves the succession in the natural course of events of sons and heirs-apparent in a very doubtful condition; while it does not appear to have been followed in practice. I shall attempt to mention here the guiding principles of succession:—

- (a) A ruler of an Indian State is the inheritor of a State conquered and built by his ancestors and does not derive his title from any grant requiring sanction.
- (b) He succeeds his predecessor by right of birth according to Hindu Law and by the rule of primogeniture (and it will be remembered that the Government of India have accepted and acted on this principle in arriving at decisions in disputed cases).

- (c) If sanction was necessary, the *gadi* of a State would remain vacant until such sanction had arrived, whereas the time-honoured rule is that the new Ruler comes into existence directly on the death of his predecessor without any ceremony whatsoever. Installation and other functions are only religious ceremonies such as take place at the time of the coronation in other countries. The right of an heir to succeed the late ruler is inherent in him by birth and has always been so held in this country by the people, and even the slightest suspicion in the direction of the disturbance of this accepted fact will cause great pain and concern to the whole body of Indian rulers.
- (d) Again, what becomes of the rights and privileges of the heirs-apparent and heirs-presumptive of a class of personages whose inherent rights to become rulers in the natural course of events are recognized even before they actually arise? It is impossible to imagine that the British Government contemplate leaving the succession of heirs-apparent in a doubtful condition. I recognize fully the delicacy of the subject and the great care that should attend any discussion on the matter, but I do hope that it will be appreciated that in submitting these views I have said nothing that the vital importance of the subject does not warrant.
- (e) Even in the case of adoption the British Government have recognized the absolute right of an Indian ruler to name and appoint his own successor (*vide* adoption sanads under the signature of Lord Canning). It was the disregard of the inheritance code and custom of Indian rule that contributed to the trouble during the régime of Lord Dalhousie: but it was the sympathy and far-sightedness of our good Queen Victoria that recognized and promised the unbroken continuity of our ancient usage in the adoption sanads. The words "recognition" and "confirmation" used in the sanads have a very special significance. Again, the words "adoption by yourself and future rulers of your State" leave the entire discretion to the rulers, requiring no approval or sanction

of the Government of India. Looking to the times when these sanads gave positive assurance to the ruling princes and were promulgated, one would admit without demur that, far from imposing any restrictions on a ruler in the selection of his successor, the sanads imposed on the Imperial Government an obligation to "recognize" and "confirm" this action of an Indian Prince. It was this policy of sympathy and recognition of old rights that, it may be safely assumed, allayed the misgivings raised by the policy of Lord Dalhousie. Thus, even in the case of adoption, the wish of the ruler is recognized as final and irrevocable, and I hope and trust that *a priori* no question will ever be raised that would tend to detract from the inherent right of lineal successors.

- (f) Attention is invited to the following words from adoption sanads given under the signature of Lord Canning to the Rajputana States which I will now read out. Therein the assurance has been conveyed that "on failure of natural heirs, the adoption by yourself and future rulers of your State of a successor according to Hindu law and to the custom of your race will be recognized and confirmed". Thus, even in regard to adoption, only the terms "recognition" and "confirmation" are used and that too of the adoption made "by yourself and future rulers of your State", and it has not been required that the *approval* and *sanction* of the British Government should be asked for or given in such cases. If that is the case in regard to adoption, the approval and sanction in regard to every succession, even in case of sons and heirs themselves of the rulers of States, would appear to be untenable.

In my own case, His late Highness Maharaja Sri Dungar Singhji Bahadur adopted me as his son and successor shortly before his death, and the Government of India merely "recognized and confirmed my succession" after the death of His late Highness, which fact was conveyed to me by the then Political Agent, Colonel Thornton, at a formal visit paid on the 1st of September 1887, i.e. the day after my accession and the performance of my installation rites and ceremonies.

‘Perhaps the impression that approval and sanction of the British Government is necessary has got about from the fact of British officers being present at installation or investiture durbars. I would venture here to offer an explanation and definition of those words round which so much unnecessary significance appears to have gathered. This may also help later on in the settlement of the ceremonials in the subsequent paragraphs of the draft. A ruling prince’s assumption of his reign consists of two, and in cases of minor princes of three, ceremonies, viz. accession, installation and investiture. Accession of a new ruler takes place directly on the death of his predecessor by the fact of there being a vacant *gadi*, for it is the recognized custom that no *gadi* can ever remain vacant. The person is deceased but the ruler always lives. “The King is dead: long live the King” is in no sense a less enforceable principle in India. In our Shastras Śrī Kṛishṇa says:

“Narāṇam cha narādhipa”

(Among men I am the king, i.e. Of men I am the ever existing man). So on death taking place the rightful heir instantly steps in. This view is verified by the fact that in some States an *Ān* or *Dhā’i* of the new ruler is proclaimed on the first or third day throughout the State after the death of the ruler. And I believe I am right in saying that after the death of His late Highness the *Ān* or *Dhā’i* was proclaimed before my adoption was formally recognized and confirmed. In some States the custom is that the dead body of a ruler cannot even be removed for cremation unless and until the successor takes his place and is the principal mourner.

‘The appropriateness of, and specially the need for, the British representatives’ formally announcing their approval and confirmation of the succession is not apparent in the light of what has been stated at length regarding the inherent right of a ruling prince in India.

‘I should like in conclusion to remark that I do not believe the British Government intended by their proposals in the draft to interfere with the rights of the ruling princes. On the contrary I am firmly convinced that it is the earnest desire of the Imperial Government to maintain and uphold them, and

in the foregoing remarks I have tried to show how they can carry out their intention of firmly maintaining for all time all these rights and privileges of the Indian rulers. I have given a full and frank expression of my views, and I hope it will be agreed that in their appreciation will be fulfilled the promises conveyed in our great Queen-Empress's memorable words : "We shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of Native Princes as our own."

'I have only to add one more remark. I do not know whether the Government of India ever in the past exercised the right which so far as I know has only now been put forward so prominently. Nor can I imagine that they would contemplate exercising it in future. I prefer to think that they consider the expression contained in paragraphs I and II a matter of formality. If so, may I ask whether it would be politic, even from the point of view of the Government of India, to raise unnecessary misapprehensions in the minds of the entire body of Indian rulers without any corresponding material gain?'

Following on this definite claim the Political Secretary suggested that the matter need not be further pursued; but the question having once been raised the princes were not agreeable to leaving it without a decision. In the result, the Conference passed a resolution which provided that succession to Hindu States will be governed by Hindu law and usage, in the case of Mohammedan States by the law and usage of the States, and in the case of adoption by adoption sanads. It was also recognized that the British Government had the authority of approval and recognition in case of disputed succession.

An equally delicate problem was involved in the ceremonial installation. Following feudal ideas, the Government of India had claimed that it was the right of the representative of the Viceroy to install the ruler on his throne. The princes thought that this was an encroachment on their sovereign rights, especially as it was claimed that the *darbar* held for the purpose would be by the political officer though in the ruler's own State

and in his own presence. The point of view of the princes was that, succession being automatic and there being no interregnum, the holding of a durbar by the political agent was wrong in principle and that the presentation of the formal letter of recognition, &c., must be at a durbar convened by or in the name of the ruler himself. The Conference also passed a resolution to this effect.

Another item on the agenda of this Conference in which the Maharaja from his personal experience took a direct interest was the form of minority administration in States. He had himself suffered from the evils of a minority government. Valued privileges had been surrendered: practices emphasizing the dignity of the State had been allowed to fall into disuse; measures had been introduced which were against the traditions of the State. From the earliest days of his reign the Maharaja had felt a legitimate complaint against the unsettled conditions of regency administrations, and in the very first Conference he had insisted that the question should be taken up. The discussions on this question were protracted; but an agreement was finally reached which was embodied later in an important resolution of the Government of India defining the principles which should govern the administration of States under a minority.

The success of the Conference was, as was acknowledged at the Conference itself, due to the untiring zeal of the Maharaja himself. As the Maharaja Ranjitsinghji of Nawanagar declared in the Conference, 'We know that this Conference owes to a certain extent, if not wholly, its origin to the zeal and political sagacity which His Highness has shown for our welfare.' As general secretary the work of organizing the princes' opinion and of acting in many cases as their spokesman fell on him, and the princes, who watched with pleasure and pride the capacity of one of their Order in organizing a delicate machinery of this nature, re-elected him honorary general secretary.

In the Conference of 1917 the Maharaja again played a leading part. He had returned from England after participating in the work of the Imperial War Cabinet, and the notable success with which he, as representative of the Indian Princes, had carried out his duties had added greatly to his prestige and influence. The Conference met in circumstances which were recognized as historic. The famous Declaration of 1917, defining the goal of British policy in India as the establishment of representative government, had been made on the 20th of August. It was known that the Secretary of State was coming out to India in the winter to study the political problem personally. A greater measure of political power and the establishment of representative institutions in British India were bound to have widespread repercussions in Indian States. This was the occasion for the princes to discuss and decide their own future policy. Many of the more conservative princes viewed the declaration of the Government of India with alarm; many were afraid that the introduction of democratic institutions in British India would endanger the traditional policy of their States and create a dangerous gulf between them and British India. As we have seen, the Maharaja took a very different view. In fact the Declaration of 1917 was to a large extent the outcome of his own representations. But while strongly holding that the time had come for a generous advance in democratic self-government in British India, he was wise enough to see that such developments should have their counterpart in the States. He had therefore strongly urged on the Viceroy the necessity of organizing a formal Council or Chamber of Princes, and insisted at the same time that the policy towards the States should be liberalized by restoring their treaty position and rectifying the encroachments that had been made in the past.

Though the circumstances were historic, the agenda

of the Conference dealt, strange to say, only with such questions as horse-breeding in Indian States, and whether the marks R.P.M.C. should be added on the motor-cars of ruling princes brought into British India. The great political events under the shadow of which the Conference was taking place had to be relegated to the opening pronouncement of the Viceroy and the closing speech of thanks which the Maharaja made on behalf of the Princes.

'In your speech Your Excellency has referred to the recent pronouncement made by the Secretary of State. The loyal attachment of the ruling princes to the King-Emperor is proverbial, and we consequently rejoice at the further accession of strength that this pronouncement and the impending political changes will bring to His Imperial Majesty's Empire by the enhanced loyalty, happiness and contentment of his Indian subjects. As Indians again we rejoice at the aspirations of our fellow countrymen in British India being thus further met by this sagacious act of British statesmanship. Might we ask Your Excellency kindly to convey to Mr. Montagu on his arrival here assurances of our warm welcome and our good wishes for the success of his mission?

'The views of individuals and associations, regarding the nature of political reforms to be introduced in British India, are shortly to be considered by Your Excellency in conjunction with the Secretary of State, and we have no doubt that you will both also consider questions connected with the ruling princes and the Indian States. And we trust that before the British Government come to any decision on such questions we, the ruling princes, will also be consulted. It cannot be too often emphasized that we represent about one-third of the Indian Empire and about one-fourth of its entire population, and that no scheme for the progress of India can be regarded as satisfactory or complete which does not take into consideration questions relating to these important territories outside British India. We feel that we too must keep a definite goal in front of us; and whilst it is essential that our rights and privileges and our position as allies and friends, guaranteed to us by solemn treaties and engagements with the British Government,



remain unaltered, our States cannot afford to lag behind in the general advance, which India's association with Great Britain alone has rendered possible. It is for these reasons that we are now all the more anxious to see the early establishment of a constitutional Chamber which may safeguard the interests and rights of ourselves and of our States. As we clearly stated last year we have no desire to encroach upon the affairs of British India any more than we want outside interference in the affairs of our States and ourselves. It is hardly necessary, therefore, to repeat that we have no desire to claim a voice in the settlement of any matters other than those relating to ourselves and our States or which are of Imperial or common concern.'

The Viceroy and the Government of India were not inclined to encourage 'the institution of a more formal assemblage', but the wiser among the princes saw clearly that if the opportunity of Mr. Montagu's visit to India was lost and the British Indian reforms placed on the statute-book without an equivalent liberalization of procedure with regard to the States and the creation of a formal organization, the future of the States would be in jeopardy. It was therefore considered necessary to act without delay, in order to put before the Secretary of State during the course of his stay in India a definite scheme embodying the views of the princes. The Maharaja, as has been stated earlier, took the initiative in the matter and arranged for an important Conference of some of the leading princes and ministers in December at Bikaner. This Conference discussed the whole question of the relations between Indian States and the Government of India, and drew up a note embodying certain conclusions and proposals to be placed before the Secretary of State on behalf of the princes as a whole. These conclusions may be summarily stated as follows: that during the period of a century or over, which covered the relations between the

States and the Crown, there had been gradual and often unperceived encroachments on the substance of the treaties and of the independence guaranteed to the princes; that political practice had developed in a manner which obscured the distinction between States; that the leveling influence of usage and precedent also encroached upon their treaties and tended to place all on an equal footing; and that in the future, unless some organization was created which was charged with the duty of safeguarding the interests of the princes as a whole, these tendencies might become more emphasized.

The Conference put forward proposals for a Chamber of Princes. But it was felt that before definite recommendations were made they should be circulated and the opinion of the princes on them ascertained. The final conclusions were therefore taken only at the adjourned session of the Conference which met at Patiala after the Maharaja had received the considered opinion of the princes on the suggestions that had been put forward. The importance of the scheme thus drawn up at Bikaner and adopted at Patiala cannot be overrated. The famous Chapter X of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was based on the proposals of the princes, and it recognized the legitimacy of the claim of 'some of the more enlightened and thoughtful of the princes, among whom are included some of the best-known names' for a share in any scheme of reform. The authors of the Report therefore proposed the establishment of a formal Council of princes which would not in any way affect the direct relations of the States individually with the Government of India.

The principle of a Council of Princes for which the Maharaja had been working so long was thus accepted. But how was the chamber to be constituted? The Princes' Committee had recommended that the Council of Princes should be composed of:

- (a) the ruling princes of India exercising full sovereign powers, i.e. unrestricted civil and criminal jurisdiction over their subjects and the power to make their own laws;
- (b) all other princes enjoying hereditary salutes of 11 guns and over, provided that no State or estate having feudatory relations with any sovereign State shall be eligible for membership of the Chamber.

The line of demarcation was most difficult to draw. Full sovereign rights as laid down in the Committee's report could be no adequate criterion, because there were obvious cases of very important States whose powers were limited by treaty. Equally there were comparatively small and unimportant States which enjoyed full sovereign status. A line of demarcation based on area, population, and revenue was also impossible. The problem was further complicated by the tributary position in which some very important States were placed in relation to others. At the Conference of Princes where the Report of Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford was to be discussed the Maharaja could not be present, as he was then in Europe attending the sessions of the Imperial War Cabinet and the Peace Conference. But the question of the proper organization of the Chamber of Princes was very near to his heart, and during the voyage to Europe he formulated his views in a note to the Viceroy. In that communication the Maharaja while emphasizing 'the very real and urgent necessity for making a differentiation between the bigger and more important States and the smaller chiefs and rulers' expressed the hope that His Excellency would deal with this delicate matter in a very generous spirit. He very strongly urged that all rulers enjoying a dynastic salute of eleven guns and entitled to be styled 'Highness' should be eligible for membership irrespective of any restrictions on their powers, and he rightly emphasized that the proper remedy where the

rulers did not possess the necessary powers was to remove the restrictions where they had been imposed or enhance the powers where they were not enjoyed. Even with regard to those States whose rulers were not 'Highnesses', the Maharaja urged a generous consideration of their claims.

'Though their powers and status are not on a par with those of the bigger rulers, the fact cannot be overlooked that their territories are comprised within that one-third of India which at present is known as the Indian States. These rulers are not British subjects and their territories undeniably do not come within British India proper. Such rulers and their subjects are clearly on a different footing from the magnates and the people of British India respectively. They cannot benefit by any of the reforms now under contemplation or that may in future be introduced in British India. When it has been found necessary to revise and overhaul the machinery regulating the relations between the British Government and the bigger Princes and States which has been in operation now on more or less identical lines for over a hundred years, a similar necessity must, I submit, also be admitted in regard to these lesser rulers and their territories. If they are excluded altogether, under the proposed division, from any benefits whatsoever in which their more important and more fortunate brethren are hoping to participate, they will soon be felt to be the weak links in an otherwise perfectly strong chain and moreover find themselves in a position of stagnation. I fully realize the difference between the two classes of rulers, but what I would venture to urge, with due respect and all the emphasis at my command, is that some method should be devised by which they too may be brought within the scope of these Reforms, and that they may feel that the interests of themselves and their States are not being ignored either by the Paramount Power or by their more distinguished brethren.

'It was for these reasons that in their original proposal, framed at the Bikaner session, the Princes' Committee proposed proportional representation of such chiefs and rulers. This point was not pressed in the final scheme of the Princes'

Committee because it was understood that such a proposal would, for the present at any rate, not be regarded as feasible by the Government of India. Power was nevertheless reserved, according to the Committee's recommendations, to add to the number in the Chamber of Princes so as not definitely to debar any one.

'It is, therefore, I submit, a matter deserving our immediate and serious consideration: what can be done so that such rulers and their people may not be left in the lurch? I am not sure that such a problem can be solved at one sitting, and it will, therefore, perhaps be desirable to consider this question further on a suitable later occasion, after the princes present at the forthcoming session have given general expression to their views on this point. Whilst not putting it forward as a definite suggestion for immediate consideration, I would further venture to add that I for one do not even now see any objection to, but would on the contrary welcome, a reasonable and proportional representation of such smaller rulers, provided they did not obtain an undue predominance in the Council of Princes and provided also that the legitimate interests of the bigger rulers and States were not in any way unfairly and prejudicially affected by such an act.'

This championing of the claims of all States, big and small, is characteristic of the attitude of the Maharaja towards the lesser members of his order. He recognized that the association of the small States with the full-powered sovereign rulers had tended to obliterate the line of demarcation between the two categories and had in the past been of great disadvantage to the rulers of the bigger States. While he was therefore convinced of the necessity of differentiating between the full-powered rulers and others, he was at all times anxious and in fact often went out of his way to champion the cause of the smaller States. It was through his powerful advocacy that the membership of the Chamber included all eleven-gun States irrespective of the powers they enjoyed and also such of the nine-gun States as enjoyed full powers,

and further provided for elective representation of the smaller States.

Though the Maharaja's absence from the Conference of 1919 was deeply felt by his brother princes, the Maharaja himself had the satisfaction that his presence in England gave him an opportunity of influencing the final decisions in a manner which would not have been open to him if he had remained in India. When the dispatch of the Government of India was received at the India Office, Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State, appointed a committee with Sir William Duke as chairman. The other members of that committee were the Maharaja's old friend Sir Charles Bayley, Colonel Dunlop Smith, Mr. J. Shuckburgh, and Mr. L. D. Wakely. At the request of Mr. Montagu, the Maharaja also agreed to serve on the committee, though there were permanent officials who looked askance at the association of an Indian Prince with such discussions. The committee met at the India Office from the 6th to the 20th of June. The main question for consideration was the constitution of the Chamber. The Maharaja urged again the point of view which he had put forward to the Viceroy in the 'Dufferin' note and was able to secure the consent of his colleagues to his formula.

The question of the 'sovereign' status of the princes which had been raised in the resolution of the Conference was also a matter on which the Maharaja felt keenly. The political officers disapproved of the term 'sovereign', as its acceptance, in their opinion, might lead to claims by rulers and States against the Government of India's conception of paramountcy. In the Committee the Maharaja urged that there should be no denial of sovereign rights and he was able to prove his point by numerous quotations of the Government's own recognition of such status in the past. The Committee finally agreed to that view. The result of this timely action by

the Maharaja was that, though prior to this time the Government of India always hesitated to accept the sovereign status of the great princes of India, to-day the matter has been placed beyond doubt and the Crown officially recognizes the rulers as being sovereign in their own territory.

Another important question which the Committee discussed was the machinery for bringing the Chamber into existence. Parliament has no authority to legislate for the States. Nor could the Government of India by any executive action call such a body into being. The Maharaja pressed for a Royal Proclamation constituting the Chamber, a procedure which would obviously give the new institution the necessary prestige without creating it by a legal enactment. The Maharaja took the opportunity afforded to him by his association with the committee to contest the loose claims which the Government of India had put forward against the States, and the gradual encroachments on their *izzat* and dignity by the alteration of the formal phraseology and by the claims for higher rank and precedence put forward by the political officers.

The work of the Maharaja in this committee was of supreme importance in evolving a satisfactory constitution for the Chamber of Princes. It enabled him to represent the princes' point of view in the final stages of the discussion and to shape plans in a manner more acceptable to the princes. The Maharaja could well say that not only did he originate the proposals, persuade the Government of India to accept them in principle, and work out the detailed scheme, but he also helped to shape the final constitution even after it had passed from the Government of India. For over six years he had worked for it, and at the India Office committee he had the satisfaction of putting the final touches to his own scheme. Truly it can be said that the Chamber of Princes was the Maharaja's own creation.

The aftermath of war brought its own problems for the Princes. The most important of these, and in some ways the most delicate, was the question of co-operation between the Imperial Service Troops 'maintained' by the States and the Indian Army. The Imperial Service Troops have an interesting history behind them. During the days of the Russian scare (1885) the princes had made voluntary offers of military help. Advantage was taken of this enthusiasm to organize, in Indian States, troops which could be utilized for field service. The scheme was voluntary and the control was vested in the ruler and his Government, British officers being attached only as advisers and inspectors. Lord Curzon, who attached much value to these units, proposed their reorganization. He said:

'The discipline, the equipment, and the efficiency of these troops . . . have steadily risen. Every year the reports of the Inspector-General testify to a continuous advance. Imperial Service Troops have been employed and have rendered excellent service in the frontier campaigns of the Government of India.'

With a view to further improving their organization Lord Curzon suggested that

'the Imperial Service Troops should be more closely incorporated in the military organization of the Indian Empire, should on occasions be given a turn of service on the frontier, be given the opportunity of coming into British cantonments, camps of instruction and manœuvres and of being brigaded with British troops.'

These State troops played an important part in the Great War. But their close association in camps and in the field with the British forces brought to light many difficulties in organization, co-operation, and etiquette on which the princes felt very strongly. The British officers were inclined to look down on the officers of Indian



States Forces and to treat them as if they were of a different class. The princes had felt that their commissioned officers were not receiving the courtesies due to them: that lieutenants in the British Army insisted on being saluted by colonels in the Indian States Forces; that officers coming back on transports after service in France and Egypt were not allowed to dine in the officers' mess. The discussion in the Committee of Princes, which was attended by the Inspector-General of Imperial Service Troops and General Wigram from the General Staff, showed how keenly the princes felt on these questions. The main difficulty had been that earlier the authorities had at times been inclined to forget that these troops were owned and maintained by the States on a voluntary basis, and while they were available for service in the interests of the Empire they were, and had to be, the troops of the rulers themselves. Lord Kitchener when Commander-in-Chief in India desired that these Imperial Service Troops should come under the Army Department, and the Maharaja had thereupon taken the strong line that he would rather disband his Imperial Service Troops than give up his undivided authority over them. The Maharaja pressed the point strongly that, so far as the Imperial Service Troops were concerned, their commissioned officers should have the same rank and status as those of the Indian Army, and in any scheme of reorganization the absolute authority of the ruler over his forces and the independence of their organization should be emphasized. As a result of these discussions important changes were introduced with a view to emphasizing the advisory character of the officers attached to these forces which belong to the States and the voluntary nature of their association with the Indian Army. The name 'Imperial Service Troops' was changed to 'Indian States Forces'. The 'Inspector-General' and the 'inspecting officers' were replaced by the 'Military Adviser-in-chief' and

'military advisers' in order to correspond more correctly with their functions as advisers. The reorganized scheme, which approximates more to the idea of the princes, makes the Indian States Forces an efficient and valued part in the organization of the defence of India.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### CHANCELLORSHIP

THE Chamber was officially inaugurated by His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught on behalf of His Majesty on the 8th of February 1921, in the historic audience hall, Dewani-i-Am, of the Moghul Emperors in the Delhi fort. The proclamation of His Majesty spoke of his affectionate care and regard for the ruling princes of India and as a token of these conveyed his assent to the establishment of a Chamber of Princes. The Duke in his address, after alluding to the importance of the occasion and acknowledging publicly on behalf of His Majesty 'the splendid record of achievement of the princes, during the greatest struggle in the history of mankind', drew attention to the important place which the princes as a body had secured for themselves in recent years in the wider councils of the Empire. His Royal Highness said:

'You have been represented in the Imperial War Cabinet and at the Imperial Conference. One of your number took part in the Peace Conference of 1919 and his signature is appended to the treaty of Versailles. More recently another of your Order attended the League of Nations Assembly at Geneva. Your Highnesses, I have witnessed many changes in my life-time. Much of the old order, as I knew it in my youth, has passed away for ever. For all classes the past 50 years have been an era of change, and the princes of the great Indian States furnish no exception to the general rule. Their conditions of life have been profoundly modified. They have emerged from the seclusion that so long hedged them round and they aspire, and rightly aspire, to play a part in the wider theatre of modern life. I am sure that the part will be a worthy one. The British Government has not been slow to recognize the justice of your aspirations; and I rejoice to think that by my share in to-day's ceremony, I am doing something to promote your

wishes and to provide a larger sphere for your public-spirited activities. . . .’

Thus was constituted the Chamber of Princes, and by a large vote the Maharaja was elected its first Chancellor. The honour was conferred on him by his brother princes not only because, by experience of public affairs, by previous knowledge of the working of the Conference, and by his own personal ability, he was the Prince best fitted for the work; it was also the recognition of the undoubted fact that the Chamber itself was the outcome of the Maharaja’s incessant efforts; that in conceiving the idea of an organization of princes and of giving it practical shape the Maharaja had contributed more than any other prince. The Standing Committee that was elected to help His Highness in carrying on the work of the Chamber consisted among others of the Maharajas of Gwalior, Patiala, Cutch, and Nawanagar, and was in every way representative of the Ruling Princes of India.

After the experience of sixteen years it may well be asked whether the great hopes entertained by the princes in those early days have been justified by the working of the Chamber of Princes. There was opposition from a few of the most important States from the very beginning. Unforeseen difficulties in the composition of the Chamber manifested themselves as time went on. Party spirit and factional rivalries, inevitable in public institutions, began to manifest themselves. But when all is said, much important work was done by the Chamber in the way of codifying and thereby limiting the political practice which had eaten into the substance of treaties, in removing misapprehensions, in defining many doubtful points in the relations between the States and the British Government. It also served in a great degree as a training-ground for princes in public affairs, and by bringing them in contact with each other to develop an idea of unity and solidarity. It may also be claimed

with justice that much of the contribution of the States to the political advancement of India, and their association with the federal scheme, would not have been possible but for the close contact with All-India questions arising from the discussions in the Chamber.

These, however, were matters for the future. When the Maharaja was elected Chancellor the functions of that office were undefined. No one knew how the Chamber itself would function. The Chancellor had no secretariat and no funds. The position required great tact and diplomacy if the Chancellor was to become an effective spokesman of the Chamber and not to sink into a gilded dignity with no authority and influence. In the absence of a secretariat the entire work in this connexion fell on the Maharaja, who had to find whatever assistance he could from his own staff, and in the early stages finance the entire work from his own treasury. The Maharaja, who had faith in the institution he had created and was naturally anxious to see it work properly, was not to be discouraged by these obstacles.

Though the functions of the Chancellor have never been properly defined, the Maharaja, with his experience of the work of general secretary, carried on as before the main work of the Chamber. In fact, when the question of the official position of the Chancellor was raised in the Chamber by the Thakore Sahib of Rajkot in February 1923, just two years after the establishment of the Chamber, Sir John Thompson, the Political Secretary, stated that

‘in practice, however, as is well known to all the members of this Chamber, the Chancellor is the principal officer of the Chamber and on him falls the main burden of the work of the Chamber and the preparation of all the business which is to come before the Chamber for discussion and the putting of it into proper shape for discussion.’

. . . . .

Though there was a desire on the part of some princes that the functions of the Chancellor should be defined and made more precise, the Maharaja himself advised them to leave things in a fluid state.

'The Chancellor can do much', His Highness said, supplementing the remarks of Sir John Thompson, 'if he works earnestly and effaces his personality, in helping Your Highnesses in putting forward your views, by keeping them in mind, and by taking action accordingly and so on. But one thing which I would ask all Your Highnesses to bear in mind is that no Chancellor should ever be entrusted by Your Highnesses with such powers as would commit the princes as a body to any definite act. He is, apart from exercising influence for good and being, I hope, also a help to His Excellency the Viceroy, and to the Political Secretary, a very important liaison officer between the Government of India and Your Highnesses. As experience is gained, no doubt it may be necessary to embody further details in the rules and regulations and the constitution, in relation to other things connected with the Chamber, but in the meanwhile, I think it will be in the interests of all concerned to leave things in the condition in which they are now.'

The Maharaja did not claim to be either the spokesman or the leader of the princes. He considered himself mainly as a liaison officer between the Chamber and the Viceroy. He knew more than any one else that in a body like the Chamber, consisting of the ruling princes of India, each sovereign in his own right and jealous of his prestige and position, any claim to leadership would give rise to difficulties of the most serious kind. Unless he walked warily and moved cautiously, there was every likelihood that the newly launched craft might suffer shipwreck on the rocks of princely jealousy. So far as possible, the Maharaja therefore effaced his own personality, while giving of his best in the way of solid work, for the Chamber. It was in conformity with this policy that at the informal conference of Princes and in the Chamber the Chancellor

always put forward some other senior prince as chairman or to reply to the Viceroy's address.

The main difficulty which the Chancellor felt in connexion with his work was the formal character of the sessions of the Chamber. The Viceroy presided at its meetings and only rulers themselves were permitted to attend the sessions. The discussion of technical questions and of political matters on which the princes felt strongly was impossible in so formal a gathering. Most of the rulers were unaccustomed to the art of public speaking and debate. They had also a natural reluctance to make themselves look small in the presence of the Viceroy and their brother princes. The Chancellor therefore devised the method of informal conferences of princes which could be attended by their ministers and other experts, at which, besides other important questions, all matters coming up before the Chamber could be discussed thoroughly, so that when the Chamber met in open session there would be no undignified scenes. The informal conference was a live body, where the princes frankly put forward their views and discussed questions on their merits. The procedure also had the benefit of bringing up for discussion matters which were not on the agenda of the Chamber but which the princes felt should be taken up independently with the Viceroy and the Political Secretary.

The first years of the Chamber coincided with the first civil disobedience movement of Mr. Gandhi. The unfortunate happenings at Jallianwalla Bagh and the dissatisfaction generally felt by the nationalists with the limited character of the reforms, combined with what was generally considered to be the anti-Muslim policy of the Coalition Government in England towards the Turks, gave rise to a tremendous wave of unrest in India. The nationalist movement of the Congress under Mr. Gandhi accepted a policy of direct action compendiously known as non-

co-operation. The wide appeal of this movement and its unexpected strength in the country impressed the Government both in England and in India, and it was clear that the reformed legislatures would follow a policy of actively demanding further reforms in the immediate future. The princes were naturally alarmed by this development, for already the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were, from the financial and economic points of view, having altogether unexpected results on the Indian States. Under pressure from the legislatures, the Government of India had inaugurated a policy of 'discriminating protection'. Customs tariffs began to mount, and though this was a matter which affected the States, the Government of India neither consulted the States nor took steps to protect their interests. The Provincial Governments had, as a result of dyarchy, been partially freed from the control of the centre. With no responsibility towards the States, the attitude of politicians in the Provincial Governments was often one of open hostility to the States. The *Akali* agitation in the Punjab, the activities of British Indian politicians in Ajmer-Merwara, the intense non-co-operation movement in Gujerat, had their repercussions in Indian States. The first-fruits of the reforms seemed to justify the pessimism of the more conservative princes, and even the Maharaja, who was one of its stoutest champions, felt some misgivings.

Besides, the new movement led by the Indian National Congress was showing tendencies towards subversive and revolutionary activities. The unfortunate incidents connected with the Prince of Wales' visit strengthened the feeling among the princes that the nationalist movement might develop into a revolutionary force. The Chancellor therefore decided that the time had come to ask for a full and frank discussion of the Government's policy towards the States in order to enable the rulers to safeguard their position. Accordingly, he wrote to Lord Reading,



the Viceroy, on the 18th of May 1922, suggesting an informal Round Table Conference of Princes representing the various parts of India, in order 'to enable the Viceroy to understand at first hand the difficulties, hopes and aspirations of princes and the remedies they suggest'. Such an informal discussion could only have been productive of good to both parties. The Government of India would have been enabled to know the point of view of the princes on many questions, and the princes on the other hand would have been in a better position to appreciate the point of view of the Government.

There were other reasons also which convinced the Maharaja that an early discussion in the manner suggested was very necessary. The experience of six years as General Secretary and Chancellor had convinced him that the discussion of technical questions like boundary disputes, acquisition by princes of non-residential property in British India, the employment of Europeans in States, with which the Chamber and its Standing Committee concerned themselves, however important, could not affect the fundamental position of the relation between the States and the Government of India. Those matters were administratively important, but what concerned the princes was to know where they stood with the Government of India. It had been frankly accepted that practice appropriate to the lesser States had been applied indiscriminately to the larger ones; but it was equally claimed that usage and sufferance had created undefined rights, that the paramountcy of the Crown had overridden the rights of the States. With every assertion of the princes' rights, based on treaties or engagements, the counter-claim of the paramountcy of the Government of India became more and more insistent. The princes were naturally apprehensive of these indefinite and undefinable claims. Until the Conference of Princes and, following it, the Chamber, had come into existence, they had had no oppor-

tunity of discussing these questions themselves, and deciding on a common policy. Their grievances had remained individual. The pressure of the princes in getting some of the matters which affected their rights defined made it necessary for the Government to formulate their claims. When the implications of the position that the Government took up slowly dawned on the princes, it became clear to them that the immediate necessity was an authoritative definition of their own position *vis-à-vis* the Government of India.

Other problems, equally delicate, agitated the minds of the princes. The rank and precedence of Indian rulers is decided by the table of salutes originally drawn up over seventy years ago and modified only by favouritism. The anomalous character of the salute-list has been officially admitted by the Government. There are many States which, at the time the salutes were originally determined, were for some reason or other given higher rank, though neither their political importance nor their military position justified it. The more glaring anomalies the Government had themselves promised to inquire into. But a unilateral inquiry of that nature could hardly have been satisfactory from the point of view of the States. Nor was it possible to have the matter discussed in the Chamber or the Standing Committee. The only suitable method for the discussion of such matters seemed to the Chancellor to be an informal conference of rulers invited by the Viceroy from each important area.

There was a further point on which the Maharaja felt strongly, and that was the simplification of political relations between the Government of India and the States. The States in Bombay, in Bihar and Orissa, in Bengal, in South India, and in the Punjab were in political relations with the Provincial Governments. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report recognized that, whatever its justification in an earlier period, with the gradual establishment of

provincial autonomy Provincial Governments would have to be divested of their connexion with the States. The Government of India also accepted that position and gave effect to the policy of bringing the States into direct relationship with itself. But in some areas, notably in Rajputana and Central India, the political relations of the States which were from the beginning with the Government of India are complicated by the existence of both political officers and an agent to the Governor-General. In the proposals put before the Secretary of State for India by the princes after their meetings in Bikaner and Patiala, a request had been made that

‘in order to remove unnecessary delays, difficulties, and the possibility of misunderstandings caused by the intervention of several intermediary agencies, and in order to ensure uniformity of policy in the dealings of the Government of India with the Indian States, and to bring the latter into closer touch with H.E. the Viceroy, all important States should, in future, be placed in direct political relations with the Government of India, either individually or by suitable grouping and through only one intermediary.’

After a full discussion of the proposal with the Princes in Feb. 1918, the Secretary of State and the Viceroy recommended in their joint report that ‘there should, wherever possible, be only one political officer through whom the State would correspond with the Government of India’.

The position in Rajputana was very complicated. There was an Agent to the Governor-General, who was the representative of the Government of India in Rajputana. Under the Agent were different residents and political agents who acted as further intermediaries with different groups of States. The complications of such an arrangement, which establishes two intermediaries between the Government of India and the States, are obvious, and the Maharaja had pressed since 1917 for the simplification of this system by abolishing either the residents

and political officers or the agent to the Governor-General. In the India Office committee he urged this point. Every year, in the Conference and in the Chamber, the same question had been raised. But the opposition of the political officers was too strong, one of them even going to the length of issuing a circular letter to the princes in Rajputana, expatiating on the benefits of the system. It was therefore suggested that this question might also be discussed at the informal conference to be summoned by the Viceroy.

To the Maharaja's proposal for a discussion of these questions Lord Reading replied accepting the proposal for a conference on the simplification of political relations, but refusing to discuss the wider questions at an informal conference.

'I am not persuaded', said the Viceroy, 'that a conference of this nature would serve any good purpose, and indeed, I can conceive, it might be positively harmful in results in more ways than one. The constitutional method of discussion of matters affecting the Indian Ruling Princes and States and the Government of India is by their ventilation in the Chamber of Princes and in the Committee of that Chamber. All rulers and States of importance are represented in those bodies. Only matters affecting Your Highness' *order* or the States as a *whole* are discussed in that Chamber and the resolutions of that body are referred to the Viceroy for the consideration of the Government of India. . . . Any informal conferences or discussions held in regard to those matters by other bodies, however constituted, must tend to lower the position and esteem in which the Chamber of Princes is held and to detract from its utility. All the great States are entitled to take part in the meetings of the Chamber; its agenda and proceedings reach them as a matter of routine. An informal conference with selected delegates on the other hand must arouse suspicion in the minds of those who do not participate in it. The mere summoning of such a conference must give rise to grave apprehensions as to the reasons for such a step where constitutional machinery already exists for the

same purpose. . . . Finally any results achieved must be infructuous. The Government of India are under a statutory obligation to deal with the resolutions passed by the Chamber of Princes which forms part of the reformed constitution established by His Majesty's Government: but the same weight could not attach to any conclusions which might be arrived at in an informal and only partly representative conference.'

Lord Reading's arguments were plausible and they were stated with the skill of a practised advocate. The constitutional theory on which the answer was based was too thin, and the argument that discussions with princes outside the Chamber would be infructuous was hardly worth serious consideration. In fact, it may be mentioned here that in both Lord Irwin's and Lord Willingdon's time many informal conferences with princes, on the lines which the Maharaja suggested, did actually take place to discuss questions affecting the States as a whole; and this very proposal, when revived under Lord Reading's successor in 1926, was accepted without demur. What was clear from Lord Reading's letter was his own definite opposition to the proposal. But the Maharaja was persistent. On his return from England, where, under medical advice, he had gone on a short holiday in 1922, he took the matter up again in personal discussion with the Viceroy. He followed it up with a confidential note in which he stated once more with the utmost frankness the reason why he thought that such a conference was necessary in the interests of the princes. After giving a list of points which could with advantage be discussed, the Maharaja said:

'Above all will loom largest the future position of the Indian States. The proposals in the "Outlines of the Scheme" discussed in 1918 were in part a provision for the future. But since then, the constitutional position of India has undergone a still more rapid change; and in the interval there has been time for the States more clearly to realize how matters now stand and to focus upon the grave difficulties that lie ahead of them—unless the

whole question is thoroughly examined, and the details thrashed out and due early provision made for an advance from the outset on right lines according to a carefully prepared scheme and a definite and sympathetic policy for the future of the Indian States and for adequately safeguarding their interests and rights. The time would therefore appear to be fully ripe now, when, in the best interests of both parties, the British Government and the States ought to take stock of the whole situation and without loss of time concentrate, during the period of transition in British India, on measures leading to a settled line of action and with the goal clearly defined and the future position of the Indian States clearly in view when a new condition of affairs will prevail in British India. Otherwise the position of the Princes and States will be an unenviable one and in many respects probably even worse than that of the loyalists in Ireland. I venture to think that His Excellency the Viceroy will agree that this is an extremely important subject of grave import to the States, which can be best discussed, at least in the first instance, by means of such full and frank informal discussions and not by set resolutions at the formal deliberations of the Chamber of Princes.'

What was at the back of the Maharaja's mind, and what had caused him and many of his brother princes anxiety, was the knowledge that further reforms, involving greater devolution of power to British India in the Central Government, were under consideration: that the nationalist movement in India had become not only democratic but had developed a theory and a technique which was in time bound to undermine the position of the States and the rights of their governments. It was therefore essential from the point of view of the princes that a clear and definite policy, not dependent on the personal whims and inclinations of individual viceroys and political secretaries, should be enunciated by the British Government in discussion with them which would safeguard their future position and determine their rights and obligations *vis-à-vis* the Government of India.

Neither Lord Reading nor his advisers had full appreciation of the alarm and anxiety which the princes felt at the course of events in British India. 'What had the princes to complain of?' was their attitude. Yet the princes, as custodians of their States, had to look to the future, and the future did not seem to them to be bright. The fate of the Irish loyalists was before them. As the Maharaja wrote to a friend:

'It really appears to be a hopeless task to bring home to some of the officials, who have been responsible for dealing with us and our States, how extremely anxious the princes are on the present position of affairs and how genuinely alarmed many of us are, chiefly on that ground, as regards the future. . . . As—speaking between you and me in the strictest confidence—one of the biggest and most loyal of the Indian Princes recently told me when discussing such matters, many princes are "not discontented but disgusted"—and, I would like to add, "discouraged and disheartened". And yet Lord Chelmsford told me that, from all he had heard from his political advisers, he was surprised to learn from Stanley Reed one day at Gajner that the princes were not happy and asked me if I could confirm that statement, which I did!'

In spite of all this argument and persuasion, Lord Reading was adamant. He could see no purpose in such a conference. The problem was in no way immediate, and, if it was, the matter should be discussed in the Chamber of Princes. In the face of this rather violent slamming of the door, the Maharaja made no reply, but it is well to point out here that if the Maharaja's proposal had then been accepted and not postponed for two years, and had the inquiry (by the Indian States' Committee) which resulted from the discussions in 1926 taken place two years earlier, the position in India to-day would have been materially different. But Lord Reading, it was clear, was not prepared to face this important problem. His hands were so full with trouble in British India and with the

affairs of some individual rulers that he did not desire to take upon himself a further problem which was both complex and baffling.

The technical work of the Chamber and the Standing Committee was in the meantime proceeding with the measured slowness with which all the political affairs of India are carried on. Of the twenty-three points which disclosed themselves on examination as involving practice detrimental to the rights of the States, only a few (for instance, relating to minority administration ceremonials, at the time of installation and investiture, and difficulties experienced in regard to the Indian States Forces) had been settled. Other questions, such as the disabilities of the States in regard to currency, salt, opium, &c., were reserved for expert examination. But even questions which did not require such expert consideration, like the acquisition of private property in British India by rulers and their sons, purchase of residential houses in hill stations, employment of Europeans and other foreigners in State service, restrictions on the power of the States to make grants of mining and prospecting licences, &c., though discussed many times in the Standing Committee, dragged on with inconclusive monotony. The Maharaja and his colleagues on their part pressed for an early solution of such questions, explained their difficulties, and devised formulae suitable to both the princes and the Government. But a new procedure had been evolved by the Political Department, which was admirably suited to lengthening all such negotiations. These questions were discussed in the Standing Committee, on the basis of a summary of the present position prepared in the Political Department. After discussion with the princes, the summary was revised and the princes went home satisfied that something had been achieved. But when the Standing Committee met again in the year following, the question would be on the agenda as 'a revised summary', with the views of the Provincial



Governments, the political officers, and the States given in parallel columns. The princes would again discuss the question, and again the summary would go for comments to the local administrations. Thus backwards and forwards the proposals went, with the result that with every succeeding year the number of parallel columns increased without any definite conclusions being reached. It is surprising that with such a procedure any question should have been settled at all, but through the persistence of the Standing Committee a few of them were actually brought to a final stage.

The importance of His Highness's Chancellorship in this connexion lay not so much in the decisions that were taken, as in the problems that were raised for discussion. Sovereignty of the States in the air, the rights of the States in regard to wireless broadcasting, the construction and maintenance of railways in the States—these were questions which affected not only the rights of the rulers but their position as sovereigns. How important these questions were in their earlier stages may be judged from the fact that originally the Government of India denied that the sovereignty of the air belonged to the rulers. It was the fight of the Maharaja and his colleagues in the Standing Committee which made the Government of India finally agree that the sovereignty of the rulers extended to the air. In the same way, the tendency in the early years was to assume for the Government of India all the authority in regard to wireless and broadcasting. Both aviation and wireless were new subjects: their importance from every point of view was so great that, in the absence of concerted action, the Government would have exercised exclusive control and claimed it under their paramountcy rights. It was the existence of the Standing Committee and the vigilance with which the Chancellor watched the interests of the Princes and carried on negotiations that saved the States in time from a serious inroad on their

authority which, if it had once taken place, could not have been soon reversed.

Another difficulty which the Princes felt, and in which the Maharaja took the keenest personal interest, was the exercise of British jurisdiction in railway areas situated within the States. The Government of India as a rule insist on the surrender of all jurisdiction on lands taken over for railway purposes. Wherever the railway line passes through a State, that area becomes British in jurisdiction, though in cases where the lines are owned by the States and pass exclusively through State territory the Rulers are 'permitted' to retain their jurisdiction. The inconvenience which results from these jurisdictional ribbons running through Indian States may well be imagined. Seditionists and other disaffected people have easy access to the State. Offenders escape into railway territory and their surrender involves all the elaborate details of extradition. Excise revenue of the State suffers serious loss, as at the railway stations and in many other ways the State administrations are handicapped by these inroads into their territorial jurisdiction. But, in spite of the greatest pressure in the Standing Committee and of the numerous discussions with the experts of the Government of India and of successive summaries, it has not been possible to do anything in the matter.

The Maharaja's own case was exceptional. Soon after his assumption of power he was asked to surrender to the British Government exclusive jurisdiction of all kinds over his railway and its future extensions. As the railway was owned by the Bikaner Government and passed through British territory only over one or two small lengths, the Maharaja was, however, 'permitted' to retain the jurisdiction, and to this day the jurisdiction is exercised by the Maharaja, but only as a matter of concession.

The work of the Maharaja as Chancellor was one of careful consolidation. The organization was in its

infancy. Many in British India looked upon it with suspicion. There were not a few in the Political Department of the Government of India who looked upon it with unfriendly eyes. A few of the more important States had disapproved of the idea and had refused to associate themselves with its work. Besides, even the princes who actually co-operated were jealous of their individual relations with the Crown and did not desire that the Chamber should set itself up as an intermediate body between them and the British Government. In the circumstances a forward policy in the Chamber would have been altogether disastrous. With characteristic wisdom the Chancellor decided that it was necessary to move cautiously, showing by results that the Chamber was not a body hostile to the Government, to gain the confidence of the princes by solid achievements on questions of common concern, and to convince both Government and the princes that the institution was intended to serve the interests of both. Much exploratory work on important questions was done. Many points on which the State administrations felt genuine grievance were brought up for discussion, and in many respects the position of the States was greatly improved.

In all this work, the Maharaja had the assistance neither of a specially trained staff nor of a general secretariat. The brunt of the work fell on himself, and on the office of the private secretary at Bikaner, which, though highly trained for State work, had no experience of general questions affecting all the States. In 1926, when the Maharaja decided to lay down the Chancellorship, the Princes in grateful appreciation of his devoted work in their interests for over ten years presented him with an inscribed gold plate. In the Chamber of Princes itself his successor in office, the Maharaja of Patiala, moved a resolution, which was supported by the Maharaja of Kashmir, expressing the gratitude of the princes for the work the Maharaja

had done for so long a time in their interests. The most striking tribute came, however, from Lord Reading himself. The Viceroy, as President of the Chamber, had occasion to work intimately with the Chancellor and knew the difficulties and circumstances under which His Highness had to labour. In 1923 he had given expression to his admiration of the Maharaja's work as Chancellor and declared that no future Chancellor 'will ever surpass him' (the Maharaja of Bikaner) 'in the enthusiasm that he has displayed in the task and . . . in the ability which he brings to bear upon it'. On this occasion, when His Highness was laying down the reins of the office which he had held with such distinction, Lord Reading paid him the following tribute:

'It would be difficult indeed for the successor or successors of His Highness of Bikaner to emulate the completeness and the efficiency with which he has discharged the very onerous duties of the Chancellor, and whatever success the Chamber of Princes may have had or may have in the future will be, as some of Your Highnesses have so justly said, in a large measure due to the services of His Highness of Bikaner. He has borne the brunt of all the preliminary work regarding the construction of the Chamber and its constitution. As I have had exceptional opportunities of observing the conduct of the work of the Chamber . . . I associate myself most cordially with all that Your Highnesses have said. This vote, accordingly, I have the honour to propose.'

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## Chapter Twelve

### FURTHER INTERNAL REFORMS

IF the period up to the Maharaja's Silver Jubilee was one of reorganization and strengthening of administrative machinery, the period that followed was one of liberalization of government and the introduction of reforms meant to bring the position of the subjects of the State more into line with that of the people of British India. The most important departure in this connexion was the establishment of the Bikaner Representative Assembly. Though His Highness's intention to call into being this body was announced at the time of the Jubilee, the completion of the rules and regulations and other details in connexion therewith necessarily took some time. The Maharaja realized that without attention to such details the Assembly, especially as there was no parallel institution anywhere in Rajputana, might prove a failure. For the purpose of drafting the necessary rules and regulations he requisitioned the services of Mr. (later Sir William) Vincent from the Government of India. After the preliminaries were thoroughly gone into and completed, the Bikaner Representative Assembly was inaugurated with all due formality by the Maharaja in person on the 10th of November 1913.

The Assembly as constituted consisted of 35 members, of whom 6 (the Ministers) were *ex officio*, 19 were nominated, and 10 were elected. It was given full power of passing resolutions, of interpellating the Government, initiating and passing legislation subject to the right of veto by the Ruler. In fact it was modelled on the central Assembly under the Minto-Morley reforms, and its powers were similar to those enjoyed by the British Indian Legislative Council.

To western eyes this institution of a Representative Assembly may seem a small and unimportant change, especially when out of a total of thirty-five the elected members numbered only ten. But it was the principle of the association of the elected representatives of the people that was of fundamental importance. The rulers of Rajputana were no autocrats in the European sense. The great nobles who had for generations spent their blood and substance in maintaining the independence of their States and the glory of their kings had in most States a dominant voice in the affairs of government. But with the advent of the British rule the dependence of the rulers on their nobles had ceased and their influence in the affairs of state also diminished; but the formalities of consulting the nobles at the time of succession and other important matters were still observed. It was, therefore, not the association of the people with the government that was new but the introduction of the principle of election. That the people should be consulted is an axiom with all governments. If the ruler chooses the representatives of the people for the purpose of consultation there is no constitutional question involved, as he is merely using every man's right of securing the best advice. For the people to decide whom the ruler should consult on their behalf—and that is what elective representation means—involves a fundamental constitutional change. By that act the people of the State become parties to the government of the State along with the ruler.

No such change had been introduced in any North Indian State. To introduce the elective element into an Assembly and to invest it with powers of legislation and deliberation and interpellation was a forward step, especially when we consider the stern and unbending conservatism of Rajputana. But the Maharaja, having decided on this measure of reform as being in consonance with

the spirit of the times, took the courageous step of trusting the loyalty and patriotism of his people. Speaking in the Assembly six years later, the Maharaja said :

‘As I have invariably made it a rule not to promise or announce anything which even with the best of intentions I and my Government might not afterwards be able to carry out, I spoke only in general terms on that occasion [the Jubilee] regarding the proposed powers and the constitution of the Assembly. A year later, I personally inaugurated the Assembly, and this was one of the proudest moments of my life. It was also a source of unfeigned pleasure to me to be able to sanction, when actually starting the Assembly, more than had been announced on the occasion of the Jubilee.

‘ . . . As regards legislation, it was originally proposed only to empower the Assembly to discuss but not to pass bills, which after being considered in the Assembly were to be dealt with by me in Council in the same way as had been done previously. But I was glad to be in a position to remove such restrictions from the very beginning, and, subject to the usual safeguards and stipulations, the Assembly was from its very inauguration empowered to deal finally with legislative measures in the State, as is done in the Imperial Legislative Council of to-day.’

There were critics then—they are by no means extinct to-day—who believe that political institutions, like some classical gods, are born in panoplied greatness, with all their powers fully developed. They do not accept the view that political development must be by the method of trial and error, and that if institutions which have grown up to suit the needs of a particular country are transplanted bodily without reference to local conditions they may, instead of being useful, be the cause of untold harm. Such critics usually advocate the establishment in Indian States of constitutional monarchy with full responsible parliamentary government on the British model. To them no beginning is satisfactory. They do not recognize that political institutions, in order to fulfil the purpose which

they are to serve, must take root and gradually grow. To them, all reform in Indian States, however fundamental, is only camouflage to mask and buttress the autocracy of the ruler.

The Maharaja was not concerned with such criticism, and he watched with keen interest the tender growth of the new constitution which he had planted. In 1917—four years after its inauguration—the Maharaja felt that the experiment had justified itself. He took a further step and increased the number of elected members from 10 to 15, granting the right of election to all towns having a population over 2,500. The total number of members was also raised to 45. The interests of the agricultural classes, which could not be represented satisfactorily by urban members, were specially safeguarded by giving direct representation to them from among the nominated seats. Four years later, in 1921, these reforms were carried a stage farther. An advisory board of zamindars—landholders and cultivators—was created, and it was empowered to elect three representatives to the Assembly, thus increasing the representation of the agricultural classes to five. This policy of creating agricultural boards and district boards and investing them with powers of election has been continued with success, both in order to give a preliminary training to the people in public affairs and as an electoral college for the Assembly. The constitution of the Legislative Assembly to-day is as follows :

Members of the Executive Council of the Maharaja	6
Members elected by the Chiefs and Nobles of the State	3
Members elected by the Municipalities in the State	12
Members elected by the Agriculturists' Boards	2
Members elected by (Canal area) District Board	3
Members nominated to represent members of the Ruling Family	2
Members nominated to represent the Chiefs and Nobles	3



Members nominated to represent the Agricultural Classes

(Sikhs and Jats) . . . . . 2

Members nominated to represent the Municipality of

Bikaner . . . . . 1

Others nominated . . . . . 11

Total . . . . . 14

Excluding the Executive Council, out of a membership of 39 the elected members number 20 and the nominated 19.

The Assembly has done very useful work during its twenty-four years of existence. In the field of legislation its activities have covered a very wide range. It has enacted such beneficent laws as restriction of usury, prevention of child marriages, regulation of charitable and religious endowments, compulsory primary education, and also a variety of important statutes relating to municipalities, *panchayats*, benevolent societies, &c. But the aspect of its activity to which the Maharaja attaches especial importance is its resolutions and interpellations, which help him to keep a check on the administration and to know direct from the people their complaints and grievances with regard thereto.

The basis on which the Legislative Assembly is constituted is local self-government. From the earliest days of his reign the Maharaja recognized that to build well one must build from below. He therefore took in hand the organization of village *panchayats*, municipalities, and local boards. In every town municipal boards were established, and in 1917 the Maharaja gave them full financial control with the necessary powers for raising funds by taxation. The number of non-official members was increased in order to secure adequate representation for each important community. To-day there are over eighteen municipalities in the State, and, strange to say, they are all self-supporting. In the villages also, the *panchayats* were given

certain civil and criminal powers and have been entrusted with executive authority.

The effects of tightening up the administrative machinery and of bringing the people into closer contact with the Ruler were soon apparent, in the improvement of general administration and the introduction of measures meant to increase the prosperity of the people. The settlement of land had been completed in 1911, but before passing final orders the Maharaja obtained the services of Mr. G. D. Rudkin, a Punjab official who was destined, as we have seen earlier, to write his name in letters of gold in the history of Bikaner. A general and more equitable revision of revenue was made under Mr. Rudkin's advice. But settlement of land revenue, however important, without improvement in agriculture could not bring prosperity. The Maharaja, well aware of the difficulties of the agriculturists in his extensive but barren territory, requisitioned the aid of experts in order to see how far new methods of husbandry could be introduced into the State. Experiments in cotton, wheat, &c., were undertaken and the quality of crops has been greatly improved. The grant of proprietary rights in the canal colony, the establishment and development of *mandis*, or market towns, the creation of zamindar (agriculturist) boards, all bear testimony to the Maharaja's consistent policy of encouraging and helping the *ryots* towards a life of security and prosperity.

Further judicial reforms were also undertaken. On the 3rd of May 1922 the Chief Court was converted into a High Court of Judicature consisting of a Chief Justice and two other judges to exercise original, appellate, and revisional jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters, and to control and guide all the subordinate judicial courts in the State. The Chief Justice was given rank and precedence with the Ministers and was invested the same powers. The powers of the High Court were also

considerably enhanced. The original jurisdiction was extended to suits of every description. Its appellate powers were increased and strengthened, the Maharaja reserving to his Judicial Committee only the right of hearing appeals where there is a substantial question of law, usage, or established custom. The High Court was in effect made the final Court of Appeal in all important matters. The Judiciary was thus made, under the Maharaja, the highest court of appeal and of original jurisdiction.

The rapid conversion of the city of Bikaner from a medieval Indian town of narrow streets and bazaars, of mean-looking houses and unimposing public buildings, into a modern capital with all the amenities of life was going on at the same time. The Maharaja has been, from his earliest days, a great builder. He recognized from the first the necessity of transforming his capital into a modern town and himself planned noble edifices, public parks, convenient and architecturally beautiful public offices, &c. Wide highways replaced the narrow gullies of old Bikaner; one by one buildings of public utility were designed and erected. Commemorative statues adorned important positions. The Hardinge Municipal Hall, the Irwin Legislative Assembly Hall, Secretariat Offices, the High Court, the Walter Nobles' School, and other edifices gave dignity to the capital and made it a modern city. The Maharaja's hand in all this is clearly visible to-day. A born builder with very considerable architectural knowledge and cultivated artistic sense, His Highness took a personal interest in all schemes for public buildings. Many originated from him; others which were suggested by the Public Works Department were scrutinized by the Maharaja himself from the point of view of artistic harmony and the unity of the general conception of the city. Public works departments all over the world have a severely utilitarian

conception of buildings. One has only to look at any modern city in India or elsewhere to feel convinced that public works engineers are the greatest enemies of beautiful cities. They have standardized plans for all buildings; each fulfilling admirably the purpose for which it is designed. To look at the town or even the street as a whole is not their business. So their buildings, admirable in themselves, never seem to harmonize, and more often than not destroy any unity of conception that an earlier and more imaginative builder may have had. The Maharaja therefore never allowed any plan for an important building in the city of Bikaner to pass without the closest scrutiny by himself from every point of view. In fact, he has been his own master-builder. In the result, the modern city of Bikaner presents an aspect different from the haphazard growth of most Indian capitals. There is nothing incongruous, nothing jarring to the taste, and the whole looks like the single conception of a master mind slowly working out and filling in the details planned years before.

In 1918 fell the centenary of the Treaty between the British Crown and the Maharaja of Bikaner. To one like His Highness imbued with historical tradition, this was indeed an event of supreme importance. A retrospect of the hundred years showed how, under the shelter of the Imperial umbrella, the State had slowly grown out of its medievalism, without in any way forgetting its military tradition, or lessening its proud heritage. By slow degrees a modern State had evolved which, while holding fast to the glorious inheritance of its magnificent history, had united in its policy a wider loyalty to India and the Empire, and had created for itself a new tradition combining the ideals of the East and the West. Looking back over that period, the Maharaja could legitimately claim that the loyalty of the house of Bikaner to its treaty obligations had been tested on many a field, that it had

stood like a pillar of rock in the many crises through which the Empire had passed, and its rulers had by their personal service earned glory for themselves and strengthened the ties which bind India to the Empire. He desired to give expression of his gratitude for the era of unparalleled peace and prosperity and uninterrupted development which, thanks to the British connexion, the State of Bikaner had enjoyed and he therefore sent the following cablegram to His Majesty:

With the profoundest veneration I beg to be permitted to tender my loyal duty to Your Imperial Majesty on the centenary of the conclusion of the first treaty between Your Imperial Majesty's Government and my State which was signed on the ninth March eighteen hundred and eighteen by the Marquis of Hastings and my great great grandfather Maharajah Sooratsinghji. Since the conclusion of this treaty of perpetual friendship and alliance and unity of interests my State and people have by Divine grace and the gracious favour of Your Imperial Majesty and your illustrious predecessors and with the sympathetic assistance of Your Imperial Majesty's Government and successive Viceroys enjoyed an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity and uninterrupted development so that we prize even more highly the advantages accruing from our having placed ourselves under Your Imperial Majesty's protection and the benefits resulting from our becoming an integral part of Your Imperial Majesty's glorious Empire. On the part of my ancestors and myself and of my State and people I would venture to hope that history will record that we have not been found wanting in our deep devotion and loyal unflinching attachment to the Sovereign and in our sacred duty to the Empire, however limited our resources and the field open to us may unfortunately have been. Our humble, but wholeheartedly loyal and earnest, endeavours to render service in the Mutiny, in regard to which an official document in the archives of the Government of India records that the loyalty and good services of my grandfather were superior to those of any other Ruler in Rajputana, in the Kabul expeditions of eighteen hundred and forty-two and eighteen hundred

and seventy-nine, in the first and second Sikh Wars, in the China and Somaliland campaigns, and in the present Great War, will ever remain amongst the proudest and most cherished recollections of my House. Whatever place Bikaner may secure this time in the roll of service in Rajputana, with all the Princes of India vying with each other in friendly rivalry to render the utmost service in their power to Your Imperial Majesty in this War, I would respectfully beg your Imperial Majesty to believe what I have on previous occasions ventured to state, namely, that the uppermost thought in the minds not only of myself and of my family but also of my subjects is to be of some humble service to Your Imperial Majesty wherever and whenever possible and that throughout the whole British Empire there is no one more loyal to Your Imperial Majesty and your 'Throne' than your loyal Bikaneries. On this historic occasion I would further beg Your Imperial Majesty to do me the honour of graciously accepting a loyal present from me of rupees three lakhs, including rupees one lakh from my Privy Purse funds, to be devoted to any War purposes or War charities according to Your Imperial Majesty's gracious commands. I am today sending an official telegram through the Viceroy and also formally communicating this humble present through him.

In reply he received the following gracious message from the King-Emperor :

I have received with the greatest satisfaction Your Highness's loyal message sent on the auspicious occasion of the centenary of the first treaty concluded between the British Government and the Bikaner State. Your illustrious House has long been distinguished for its loyal devotion to the British Crown and I am well aware how worthily these traditions are maintained in Your Highness's own person. I gratefully accept Your generous offer of a further sum of 3 lakhs to be expended on purposes connected with the war. I will cause Your Highness to be informed in due course through His Excellency the Viceroy of the particular objects to which the gift will be devoted.

GEORGE R.I.

The Maharaja had always considered it a privilege to entertain members of the Royal Family when on visit to India. In fact there is no occasion since His Highness came of age when Bikaner has not been included in the programmes of their Royal Highnesses. The visit of H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught took place in 1903, and that of His Imperial Majesty King George V (Prince of Wales as he then was) in 1905 has already been mentioned. In 1921 His former Majesty King Edward VIII, as Prince of Wales, honoured the Maharaja and Bikaner with a visit. The Maharaja's heir apparent was appointed to the staff of His Royal Highness and the courtesy was much appreciated by His Highness. Naturally the visit of the heir apparent to the British Throne was an exceptional event. His Royal Highness, whom the Maharaja had the privilege of knowing since 1902, came as if to his own home, and the arrangements made for his reception and entertainment were personally supervised by the Maharaja. At the banquet given in the Prince's honour the Maharaja alluded to his close association with the Imperial Household extending over nearly twenty years and said:

'During all this period, what stands out in one's memory is the unfailing kindness and consideration displayed by their Imperial Majesties for those around them and that human touch of real sympathy which cheer and encourage one even under the most adverse circumstances, and secure for all time the devoted attachment of those brought under the spell of such magnetic charm. The welcome which I tender to Your Royal Highness to-day is therefore not only from the Maharaja of Bikaner but also from an old and devoted member of the Imperial Household.'

His Royal Highness's reply was couched in equally warm terms:

'I need not assure Your Highness', said His former Majesty, 'that I have been looking forward keenly to my visit to Bikaner from many motives. In the first place, I desired to renew and

strengthen my deep personal friendship for Your Highness by a visit to you in your home; and in the second place I wished to have the privilege of seeing the capital of this Rathor State and to try to judge for myself what is the magic of this desert environment which makes loyalty to my House flourish here like a green bay tree and stimulates a friendly rivalry with other States to stand first in the service of the Empire.'

Since the Maharaja's coming of age, no Viceroy has failed to pay a formal visit to Bikaner. With Lord Hardinge the Maharaja's relations were so cordial and intimate that, apart from the official visit that he paid in December 1912, on the occasion of the Maharaja's Jubilee, His Excellency came on private visits on two more occasions. Though these visits were informal and were in no sense occasions of State ceremony, they did not pass without comment. But Lord Hardinge was too great a man to take notice of the voice of jealousy or to be deflected by the whispers of political officers. Lord Chelmsford, with whom also the Maharaja's relations were extremely cordial, visited the State in 1918 and 1920. His Highness took the occasion of the banquet to allude to the formation of the Chamber of Princes and the policy of non-intervention which Lord Chelmsford with generous sympathy had reiterated. Lord Chelmsford responded by a statement of the changed position of the princes in the new India that was then coming into existence.

'There is', he said, 'a great obligation resting on the Ruling Princes who possess such experience to guide their fellow-countrymen in the path of self-government by reminding them that duties to the State exist as well as rights of the individual, that liberty does not mean licence, and that firm government and not anarchy is the true condition of progress. One result of the war is to show that political isolation, whether of nations, or of communities within a nation, will in the future be impossible. Not through any deliberate act of government but by the inevitable law of progress the peoples of the Indian



States will be drawn into ever closer contact with those of British India. The effect of this tendency will be on the one hand a greater opportunity for the Indian princes to take their place as the natural leaders of the people, and on the other a growing public demand for the application of the principles of progress to the government of the Indian States. However we may be tempted to regret the passing of much that is picturesque and attractive in the old world isolation of the Rajputana States no wise ruler will shut his eyes to the logic of facts or fail to prepare for what is surely coming. Fortunate is the State where the administration has nothing to fear from public scrutiny and where changes come as a gradual development from within and not by an unwilling surrender to the superior force of public opinion.'

Another distinguished guest the Maharaja was privileged to entertain, in 1922, was M. Clemenceau. The Maharaja had met M. Clemenceau at the Versailles Peace Conference, where as Prime Minister of France he presided over the deliberations of the Conference. A friendship had grown up between the great radical leader whose fierce political antagonisms had earned for him the formidable title of 'Tiger', and the leader of what was universally recognized as the most conservative order of princes in the world. The Maharaja appreciated the unbending courage, the stern determination and the heroic devotion of the old patriot, who, with Gambetta, having led the opposition to the surrender of Alsace-Lorraine, had lived to sign the treaty which restored to France her lost provinces. His very intransigence and cynical contempt for the platitudes of President Wilson, when they tended to affect the interests of France, his cool disregard of the popular opinion of the Conference, appealed to the Maharaja. There was much of the born autocrat in Clemenceau and the sturdy old man dominated the Conference. Equally the outstanding personality and charm of manner of the Maharaja appealed to

the veteran statesman who in his time had met and dealt with many kings and princes on terms of equality. At a private party the Maharaja suggested to him that if he came to India, the Maharaja would be pleased to introduce the French tiger to the tiger of the Indian jungle. This word, spoken no doubt in jest, was remembered by M. Clemenceau when after a tour in the Far East he decided to visit India. From Indo-China he wired to his old friend of the Peace Conference that he looked forward to meeting the Indian tiger. The Maharaja was very pleased to entertain his old friend, and from the moment he received the information he put himself in charge of all the arrangements. In fact M. Clemenceau's whole tour in India was planned out by the Maharaja with that extraordinary minuteness of detail and thorough attention to the convenience of his guests which characterizes all his hospitality. A fine tiger shoot was arranged in Gwalior, the Maharaja himself accompanying to watch the meeting of the tigers. Unfortunately there is no record as to how M. Clemenceau behaved when face to face with the animal from which he took his name and of which three were slain in one expedition, but he himself claimed that the experience was sufficient to have justified his visit to India.

In Bikaner the distinguished guest was shown all the courtesy to which his own position and the esteem in which he was held by the Maharaja entitled him. At the banquet which was held in his honour the Maharaja recalled his own pleasant associations in Paris and the historic events in which both of them had taken part. M. Clemenceau, who had been greatly moved by the honour and courtesy shown to him, replied in a speech which in the circumstances of an Indian State could hardly be called tactful. He was embarrassingly frank in his comment on Indian and international affairs. Indeed the old Tiger had never been accustomed to

utter polite platitudes and either he did not know, or he did not care, what the reactions of the Englishmen at the table would be to his utterance. But about the Maharaja himself he spoke almost with affection. 'No doubt', he said, 'our host is descended from a distinguished line of ancestors. It is something to be descended from a long and distinguished line. It is more important what one has made himself to be. To be both is indeed a matter of great honour.'

What impressed the old radical was not that His Highness was the twenty-first ruler and the twelfth Maharaja of Bikaner. He had himself seen how often the descendants of kings and princes become popinjays. But what he had seen of the Maharaja himself and his achievements endeared him to his heart, and Clemenceau took back with him a high regard for his host. On reaching Paris he wrote him a letter which shows the Tiger in his playful and affectionate mood.

'I see you are not a great writer, but I am not going to complain of it, my great reason being that you are as near perfection as imperfection can be. Another point is that you know very well how to make use of the telegraph, and that, in fact, three lines well used can say a great deal although three or four pages well employed are not to be despised.

'Indeed letters or despatches are not necessary to remind me of my great Bikaner friend for I have just received from London two fine buck heads with the triumphant inscription of Gajner. Here they are in the very room wherein I am writing, and as our people are very apt to be inquisitive, I have to explain to my visitors what is Gajner, its beauties and the high feats of the Maharaja of Bikaner. And this being a fine opportunity, I take it to speak of you, which gives me the greatest pleasure.

'On the day I left Paris, I had a letter from London advising me that the tiger skins were ready. But I had rather have them remain where they are than come to Paris while I am not there. So I am to see them at the beginning of October only, and it

St Vincent and Gard  
par Gard  
Vendée  
aug 13<sup>th</sup> 1924

Dearest friend,

Have good news of your Highness to write me  
this kind letter. May your mission be of good  
results to all, and especially to your friends.  
Need I say how delighted I will be to see you. I  
expect to be back in Paris on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October.  
Therefore shall I have the very great pleasure to  
shake hands with you and speak of the fine  
entertainment I had from your Highness in India.  
This part will never be forgotten. à bientôt.

My best congratulations for the birth of  
a grandson - continuation of the highest Rajput  
blood.

Believe me, ever  
your good and grateful friend  
E. Clemenceau

Facsimile of Letter to the Maharaja from M. Clemenceau



will be a great joy for me to remember that one of them comes from His Highness of Bikaner.

‘Here I am by the sea side and I suppose you are in Mount Abu. Wherever you are, if you do not write a line or two I’ll call you a great Prince but a very wicked boy.’

In January 1922 Lord Reading paid Bikaner a visit of six days. The Maharaja had known Lord Reading from the days of the Imperial Conference and therefore he came both as an old friend and as the representative of the King-Emperor. He had been in India for nine months and had been faced during that period with a position of extraordinary difficulty. The first non-co-operation movement was at its height, and the long shadow of Amritsar had cast a terrible gloom all over the country. Lord Reading had dealt with the situation with firmness and tact, but the position in British India had given him but little time to attend to the affairs of the States. In times of political crisis the Government of India are apt to forget the century-old principle of British policy that one of their primary duties is to maintain friendly and sympathetic relations with the States. In the circumstances of 1922 this was all the more important as the civil disobedience movement of India had not left the States entirely unaffected. Agrarian discontent and generally disloyal activities had been fostered in Indian States from convenient centres of British territory situated near and sometimes within the States. The relaxation of the control of the press had permitted the wildest stories to be published against the States and their rulers, and the establishment of the Chamber of Princes had been viewed with grave suspicion in British Indian quarters. The Maharaja spoke frankly about this question in his banquet speech.

‘The amount of misconception that prevails in regard to the aims and aspirations of the Indian States is astonishing, and much absurd talk is heard in various quarters relating to such

· matters. On the one hand, even from some of those who ought to be better informed, we hear it stated that the Princes desire to change their constitutional position and political status in the scheme of Empire. In other quarters, obviously hostile to us, are attributed sinister aims and unworthy motives both to the Imperial Government and to the princes, who are even represented as having formed an unholy alliance with the object of retarding the constitutional progress of British India. As one who has for the past five years and more been in close touch with his brother princes firstly, as their honorary general secretary for the Conferences which were formerly held, and now as Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, I claim to speak with some first-hand knowledge when I say that there is not the slightest justification for any such ideas. Your Excellency has also had opportunities of observing for yourself the great good that the Chamber of Princes is already doing, especially in promoting the solidarity of the relations between the Crown and the princes, and of seeing how far it really is from being a menace to the Empire or to the liberties and the legitimate aspirations of the people of India, including our own subjects, or from clogging the wheels of national progress. What the princes as a body desire is to see their inherent rights and privileges, which are guaranteed by their treaties, and their *izzat* and prerogatives maintained unimpaired, and the machinery governing their relations with the British Government revised in the light of experience gained in the past hundred years and more, and brought into line with modern requirements. In this way the princes will be enabled to achieve their just aims and aspirations, and thus be placed in a stronger and better position to play an ever-increasing part in doing their duty by their people as rulers of their own States, and by taking their due share in upholding the honour and glory of the Emperor and the Empire. Their wishes, thanks to the reforms recently promised to them, have been largely met by the institution of the Chamber of Princes and by the other measures already promulgated by the British Government, and it is confidently hoped that with your Excellency's kind and sympathetic attention the remaining necessary steps will also be taken before long. I do not believe that I am biased in saying that what the

princes desire will be found to be both reasonable and capable of attainment within, we trust, the period of Your Excellency's Viceroyalty and without detriment to Imperial interests or those of their Motherland, of which, in spite of unfriendly assertions to the contrary, the princes claim to be as true and patriotic sons as any.'

Lord Reading replied cautiously but with warm personal feelings.

'I realize that this hospitality is to me as Viceroy—his Majesty's representative—and that you, the Ruler of this State, find pleasure, may I say a privilege, to entertain the King's representative. If only on that ground, I should be glad to have been your guest; but there is also a personal note reflected in your observations which found a full and echoing response in my mind: not only are you entertaining me as Viceroy, but also as a former colleague in the Imperial War Cabinet, when I rejoiced to note that India and India's States were represented in that important assembly. When again we met throughout the anxious period of the Peace Conference we lived in the same establishment and were in the habit of frequent converse and intercourse. I then learned to value not only the sagacity but the broad outlook and the wise judgment of His Highness. There were sown the seeds of a riper friendship which found its response in one of the first messages sent to me from India when I was appointed Viceroy; it came from His Highness full of thoughtful wishes for success and of realizations of responsibilities. It has been my good fortune again to meet His Highness as Chancellor at the Chamber of Princes where I had the duty and, let me say also the privilege, to preside. I saw him re-elected as Chancellor, notwithstanding his protestations on the ground of his other occupations; and now I find myself here in this great sandy plain where, without being quite able to picture how it is done, I have been transported from one palace here to another at Gajner where it seemed to me that I was in the land of imagination, of the fairies of whom I read and heard in my youth. The enchanted palace was there, and all that a human being could do to make not only our stay, but that of all



assembled there as happy, as pleasant, as enjoyable as it could be, was achieved by His Highness. And as if that had not already sufficed to enhance our friendship, there fell from you to-night words of appreciation of the lady who has honoured me with her company during so many years. I think Your Highness must be gifted with an extra sense: you must know, and have divined its significance from your own experience, what the assistance of Her Excellency has meant to me in any service I have been asked to perform. I thank you and shall say no more than that you have put into words that which generally lies buried very deep in the male heart.

‘... Standing here in this hall, in this fort, in this State, with this Prince, I must make some observations before leaving you. Since I first set foot in this State I have examined, I have considered and I have admired. It must be a wonderful experience to reign as the twenty-first ruler of the State, and as the twelfth Maharaja. The quality of the eclectic is well marked in Your Highness; you have displayed it in extracting from the West the special knowledge of the West and applying it wisely and judiciously to the special environments of the East. In itself this is a notable accomplishment. At this moment I think of His Highness as I saw him to-day—as I see him now—at the head of his forces at the review on his own parade, in his own country, on his own soil. I see him riding at the head, a proud figure, and yet with the consciousness of responsibility, a fine figure, a resplendent figure. I thought to-day as I saw him approach, here is a presentation in the twentieth century of Rajput chivalry. Rapidly my thoughts travelled from the gorgeous and beautiful uniform and from the honours resplendent upon his breast, which have been showered upon His Highness, to him as ruler and administrator. Look at his achievement in administration. I have had the advantage of reading and studying the records of this State. I recall Your Highness’s advent to the *gadi* when seven years old with a Council of Regency until your majority, and then I see Your Highness striding forward swiftly till, after a little over 20 years of administration, you have the proud satisfaction of observing that the revenues of your State have increased from Rs. 20 lakhs, as they were when you first administered them to

over Rs. 80 lakhs as they are at the present day. And here this very gratifying subject must be left for to-night.

‘It must indeed be gratifying to a father’s heart to see his son learning, whilst his father is still young, to shoulder the burdens and bear the responsibilities of State administration. It would be difficult to select for a father a pleasure which could equal that. If I may congratulate His Highness on having the assistance of his son, while still so young, and when many of his age might be devoting themselves to lighter pursuits, may I be allowed also to congratulate his son upon possessing so young, so picturesque and so attractive a father.

‘Let me add that it is my firm conviction that whatever may happen, whatever may befall in the future, Bikaner will be true to its traditions and will be staunch and faithful to the Crown.’

On the 9th of September 1920 the Maharaja’s eldest son, Prince Sadul Singhji, came of age. To the Maharaja, who knew what misfortune it is for a State to be under successive minorities, this was indeed a happy occasion. His predecessor’s reign was preceded by a regency. His own minority lasted for over eleven years. Apart from his feelings as a father the Maharaja as a Ruler had cause for rejoicing to see his son attain the age of majority. The Maharajkumar had been very carefully brought up under the supervision of his father. As the Maharaja himself said, the son’s upbringing in a manner befitting a Rajput prince had been his constant care. Besides a sound and liberal education under private tutors, the Maharajkumar received the military training necessary for every Rajput and the administrative training necessary for a ruler. At the age of sixteen the Prince was given opportunities of gaining insight into the workings of the State departments from different ministers and with his father when not on imperial missions. In the later years of his minority he was associated with the Council and thus had received a general training in the arts of government.

There were many who advised the Maharaja to send the young Prince to England for higher education. But the experience of one or two rulers who had tried the experiment, and his own observations, convinced the Maharaja that it was not a wise course to follow. The risks and disadvantages of a prolonged stay in a foreign country for a young prince seemed to him to outweigh any advantage that a course of education abroad might have. But the Maharaja recognized the benefits that visits to Europe under proper conditions might bring to young men in their formative stage. Therefore, in 1918, when he went to the Peace Conference he took with him his son, who in his father's company thus received his initiation into high political affairs.

On the Prince's coming of age the Maharaja decided therefore to associate him directly with the administration. Such indeed was the tradition of Hindu monarchies in the past. It has many obvious advantages. The ruler's own burden is lightened, while the son under his father's guidance learns the difficult art of governance. The Maharaja after careful consideration therefore decided to appoint his son as Chief Minister and President of the Council.

'What prouder moment', said the Maharaja in announcing this decision at the Durbar at the Prince's coming of age, 'can there be in the lifetime of a ruler than to witness the fruition of his early efforts and to have the supreme satisfaction of seeing his heir enabled at such a suitable age to take his share in the State administration and thereby enabling him, under his personal supervision and guidance further to equip himself for the still greater responsibilities which, please God, lie before him. And what greater guarantee can there be to the people for continuity of policy and for the uninterrupted progress of the various measures and reforms under contemplation at present for the development and the moral and material advance of the State and its people in various directions. Similarly what brighter

augury or greater encouragement can there be for an heir-apparent than to receive such powers from his father amidst such universal goodwill and widespread acclamation . . . ?

However well established in Hindu tradition, under modern conditions this was a remarkable experiment. It may be doubted whether it was entirely wise to make the Maharajkumar formally Chief Minister of the State and entrust him with the work of direct administration, instead of more informal association with his father and the government of the State. The Maharajkumar was conscientious, painstaking, and amenable to advice. He took his work seriously and in every way tried to co-operate with his Council and make the work of administration a success and gain further valuable experience and insight into the working of the State machinery. But the task set him was not easy. To be son and servant involved too many complications and difficulties. Besides there were many bent on creating mischief between the father and the son from purely selfish motives. At all times there are people who have a special aptitude to fish in troubled waters and a few such men were not lacking in Bikaner.

Both the father and the son slowly came to realize that the position was fraught with danger, and on more than one occasion the Prince approached the Maharaja with the request that he might be relieved of his onerous responsibilities as Chief Minister. Early in 1925 the Maharajkumar wrote to his father expressing his definite wish to relinquish the appointment.

‘Your Highness will recall that during the past year or two I have ventured on more than one occasion to approach Your Highness with a view to be permitted to relinquish my appointment as Chief Minister. I at the same time assured Your Highness of my readiness and anxiety to work with Your Highness, as well as to deal with any work Your Highness may give me from time to time.

‘In continuation of my recent conversation with Your Highness on the 12th instant, I now venture once again to approach Your Highness on the subject, in the confident hope that Your Highness will be pleased on this occasion to see fit to accede to my request.

‘The main reasons for my preferring this request may be summed up as follows:—

- (a) Practical experience and work extending over the last four and a half years, has shown that the Chief Minister’s work does not bring me into close enough touch with your Highness, since I have to be absent at prolonged Council meetings every day, in addition to attending to any other special work that may be entrusted to me.
- (b) Above all, experience has shown that there are real dangers, both to the State and to the dynasty, in the heir apparent of a State being associated directly with the Government, since it affords opportunity to mischief-makers and other disloyal and dishonest persons to try and start intrigues with a view to causing a split between father and son and creating unhappiness in the family as well as undermining the strength and solidarity of the Government, and diverting the energies of the State into other channels.
- (c) The recent political intrigues—happily things of the past—have shown that some unscrupulous persons in our own State were inspired by the same detestable aims and induced all kinds of wild rumours regarding dissensions in our family and divergences of views between your Highness and myself where matters of policy and administration were concerned. Though we have happily been able to show a united front and give the lie direct to such talk, the interests of the State and our family demand that in future no such opportunity should be open to designing persons of this kind even to make such attempts through the continuance of a system which practical experience in our own State also has shown to be unsuitable and undesirable.

‘On these grounds therefore, I submit for Your Highness’s

favourable consideration that I should now be permitted to relinquish my appointment as Chief Minister.

‘I need hardly assure Your Highness of my deep affection and respect, and of my sincere desire to continue to be of service to Your Highness and the State in any way Your Highness may command, and of my anxiety at all times to fulfil my obligations and, as a dutiful son, to help and relieve Your Highness’s burden in any small way that may be in my power.’

In reply the Maharaja wrote as follows:

‘I have carefully considered the request preferred in your letter of the 15th instant. As I told you when you approached me on the subject on previous occasions also, I do not think there is necessity really, especially so far as you and I personally are concerned, for you to relinquish your appointment as Chief Minister.

‘I am of course fully aware that past history, both in Eastern and Western countries, has demonstrated the unsuitability of an administrative arrangement under which the heir apparent is directly associated with the Government, but I was hopeful that with conditions prevailing in our State we should be able to work it; and the experiment was in any case well worth trying.

‘In view however of your strong wishes in the matter; and since unfortunately it is a fact that the dangers both to the State and to the dynasty to which you refer are inherent in such a system; and as I am unable to deny the force of what you have in conversations, when pressing such request, repeatedly urged—viz., that, when we are both in entire agreement, in principle as well as from our own actual experience, that such a system is undesirable and unsuitable, it should not be continued any longer, I have after the most anxious consideration and with the very greatest regret decided to accede to your request; and I sanction the abolition of the post of Chief Minister and President of the Council, which was specially created by me for you.

‘Whilst your relinquishing your appointment as Chief Minister of the State must necessarily be a matter of disappointment to me, since it means the ending of a great experiment, you

may rest assured that your doing so will of course not lessen my deep affection for you. My main object in appointing you as Chief Minister was to enable you, under my personal supervision and guidance, to gain practical knowledge of the working of the State departments and to equip you for the responsibilities which, please God, one day lie before you. Your four and a half years' work as Chief Minister has substantially helped to attain this object; and so long as you are able to gain a deeper insight into the duties and responsibilities with which the Ruler of a State is faced, which you will be able to do by working with me, and by your readiness to deal with any special work which I may entrust to you from time to time, it does not really make any difference whether that aim is achieved by your working as Chief Minister or as my son and heir. From practical experience gained here I am also in complete accord with you that the only wise and satisfactory means of achieving such an end is by the latter method without the heir apparent having any special portfolio, powers or responsibilities.

'In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation of your work and arduous labours as Chief Minister during the last four and a half years; and I need hardly say how gratified I am at your dutiful sentiments of affection and respect for me personally; your desire to continue to serve the State and me; and your anxiety to fulfil in other ways also your obligations as heir apparent of the State and to help in any way in your power to lessen the burden which I have to shoulder.'

Two extraordinary events disfigured the history of the State during this period and made the Maharaja realize the wisdom of the ancient maxim that constant vigilance is the price that internal peace exacts from every ruler. The Maharaja's pre-occupations with external policies and his absence at the League of Nations gave opportunities for the mischief-makers to raise trouble in the State. An attempt was made in the Maharaja's absence to create discord within the royal family itself. The chief actor in this conspiracy, which at one time threatened

to take a very serious turn, was Rawat Man Singhji of Rawatsar, one of the principal chiefs of the State, aided and abetted by a minister who was on the eve of retirement and who had hopes through such discord of remaining in power. The Maharaja had evinced great interest in the young rawat and had treated him with great affection and consideration. He had him educated in the Nobles' School and at the Mayo College. He was further given secretariat training and attached to the *Mahkma Khas* for a time, being appointed later on to be personal assistant to the Revenue Minister. The Maharaja had given him every encouragement, and in accordance with his policy of training the leading nobles for high appointment had marked him out for responsible posts. In 1921 the rawat was appointed sirdar-in-waiting to the heir apparent, a post of great honour and carrying with it some influence in view of the fact that the Maharajkumar was at that time also Chief Minister.

All this honour and favour only served to bring out the inordinate ambition of the rawat. He put in claims with a view to aggrandizing his *thikana* and to establish seniority over the Raja of Mahajan who for nineteen generations had been universally accepted as the premier noble of the State. These claims were disallowed by the Maharaja after full inquiry, and the disgruntled noble tried to utilize his position near the person of the heir apparent to sow seeds of discord between the Maharaja and his son. Taking advantage of the Maharaja's absence from the State, the rawat had two letters forged purporting to come from members of his Highness's family, by which he hoped to convince the Maharajkumar that his life itself was in danger. The allegation in short was that there was an intrigue in the palace to do away with the Maharajkumar by the practice of black magic, and forged letters in support of this statement were placed before him. But the Maharajkumar, though young, was not



taken in by these machinations, and when it was clear that efforts were being made to estrange him from his father, he reported the matter to the Maharaja who appointed a special tribunal to inquire into the case and try the rawat for disloyalty and treason. The tribunal found the rawat guilty, and the disloyal noble was deposed and detained in the Fort.

The one satisfactory aspect of this otherwise unsavoury affair was the staunch loyalty and filial affection of the Maharajkumar who, in very trying and difficult circumstances, not only did his duty as a Prince but showed initiative and courage in having the matter fully inquired into and the offenders punished. The event also had the effect of opening the eyes of the Maharaja and the heir apparent to the dangers inherent in the situation of the heir apparent holding the chief executive position in the State.

Different in kind from the Rawatsar intrigue and unconnected with it, but equally serious, was the case of Raja Jeoraj Singhji, whose defiant conduct instigated by the disloyal attitude of his elder son, Bhairun Singhji, saddened the Maharaja during this period. Raja Jeoraj Singhji was a relation of his late Highness by marriage, and was a nobleman with influence and interest in some neighbouring States. The Maharaja had as a mark of his favour given him the title of Raja and appointed him a member of his Council. Jeoraj Singhji held a village, Kalyansinghpura in lease, which through dubious methods he had tried to convert into a *jagir* grant. In the general policy of the exchange of *jagir* villages in the area proposed to be irrigated by the Sutlej Valley Project, it was decided to resume Kalyansinghpura and give to Jeoraj Singhji in exchange villages bringing more than double the income. The Maharaja discussed the details personally with Jeoraj Singhji and in February 1921 ordered his revenue officers to proceed to Kalyansinghpura

for the purpose of a careful and detailed examination of the receipts, cultivated area, and other relevant matters. This examination showed that the income from the village was about Rs. 7,000 a year, and though under the general orders of Government the villages given in exchange were to bring only 50 per cent. more revenue, the Maharaja was pleased to order that the total annual income of villages so given in this case should amount to Rs. 15,000. Jeoraj Singhji, however, was not satisfied and made a representation to the Maharaja that the income might be raised by another Rs. 5,000. As a special favour the Maharaja agreed to the increase on his next birthday as a *jagir* grant.

Then arose trouble. During the examination of titles prior to the exchange of villages, Mr. Rudkin informed the Maharaja that revenue records did not show Kalyansinghpura to be a *jagir* grant. When the Maharaja, on his return from holiday in June, received in audience Jeoraj Singhji and his son, the raja, angry at his dishonesty having been discovered, took up an attitude of open and insolent defiance to the Maharaja himself. The Maharaja in consultation with his Council decided that the best way to decide the question of his claim to Kalyansinghpura was to appoint a special commission to go into the whole question of title. The commission so appointed consisted of Maharaj Sir Bhairun Singhji, K.C.S.I., two members of the Maharaja's Government, and the Chief Justice and another judge of the High Court. Jeoraj Singhji refused to appear personally before the Commission or to give any statement, though he was represented by counsel from outside the State.

The Commission after protracted inquiry reported that the revenue records clearly proved that Kalyansinghpura was held only on lease from the State on payment of all State dues and a fixed annual sum which had later been remitted; that Jeoraj Singhji by careful planning over a long period of years had led the revenue officials to believe

his statement that it was a *jagir* grant; and that he had encroached on State land outside the lease and assumed its revenues to the extent of over Rs. 4 lakhs. Ultimately Jeoraj Singhji and his son defied State authority to the extent of threatening to take up arms. The Maharaja therefore, acting on the advice of his Council, resumed the lands and confiscated the *jagir* and deported him from the State.

Jeoraj Singhji used his influence to begin an intrigue outside the State with the object of inducing the Maharaja to withdraw his orders. He interested Sir Robert Holland, the Agent to the Governor-General, in his affairs. The Maharaja was approached by Sir Robert with a request that Jeoraj Singhji might be forgiven and taken back into favour after full apologies. He even forwarded an apology drafted by himself for the approval of the Maharaja. His Highness, who still had vivid recollections of the attempt of the Political Department to interfere in his decisions on the conspiracy of the nobles in 1904-5, was not prepared to brook this interference. He realized that any modification of his order at the suggestion of the Agent to the Governor-General would only be understood by the general public as a victory for Jeoraj Singhji, and would be an encouragement for any other recalcitrant noble to follow his example. Sir Robert Holland's suggestion, however informally conveyed and however politely worded, was clearly an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the State in a matter in which, after full judicial inquiry, the Maharaja had given a final decision. What the Maharaja was not prepared to accept in 1905, when he was still young and inexperienced, he was not likely to tolerate in 1925. Sir Robert Holland was informed politely but firmly that the circumstances of the case did not justify any intervention from the representative of the British Government, and that the Maharaja hoped that Sir Robert would not address him

formally as he would be constrained in such a case to say 'no' to him. The Agent to the Governor-General wisely let the matter rest.

The loyalty of the large body of nobles and sirdars was in no way affected by these unpleasant incidents. Twenty-five years of the Maharaja's effective rule had in fact brought about a complete change in the attitude of the nobility. In the conspiracy of the thakurs in 1904-5, not only were a number of nobles disaffected but they felt themselves strong enough to defy the State and to organize a general opposition. The disaffection of the Rawat of Rawatsar and the contumacy of Jeoraj Singhji had no such general effects. This was due to the wise policy which the Maharaja had pursued of providing facilities for the education of the chiefs and nobles, of maintaining them in their just rights while not permitting any encroachments on the rights of the State, and of associating them increasingly with the responsibilities of government.

The Maharaja had always evinced the deepest interest in the well-being of the nobility of the State. Even in his minority he had, as mentioned earlier, taken personal interest in the Walter Nobles' School. He had, at different periods of his reign, taken effective measures to maintain their prestige and to make them a more useful body to the State. He had always closely associated them with the government and attached the more educated of the younger generation to his person, and had missed no opportunity to bring home to them the necessity of an aristocracy to justify its position by serving the State and its sovereign. Neither the rebellion of the nobles in 1904-5, nor the treason of the Rawat of Rawatsar, nor the disappointment caused by the conduct of Raja Jeoraj Singhji diverted him from this policy.

In September 1925 the Maharaja took the occasion of the annual Dusserah banquet to announce the establishment

of a Sirdar's Council to advise him on all matters connected with the privileges and dignities of the nobles of the State. This Council was to consist of six nobles and a president, three elected by the nobles themselves and three nominated by the Maharaja. He realized that it was alike in the interests of the nobles and of the State that their leadership should be fully utilized, that they should, as in ancient times, be counsellors of the Maharaja and pillars of the State. To arouse their sense of responsibility for this duty was the policy of the Maharaja. On the occasion of the establishment of the Sirdar's Council, he exhorted them to remember their integral connexion with the State.

'We want as many of you, sirdars of the State', he said, 'as are qualified to come forward and enter the State service out of patriotism for your country, loyalty for your Ruler and the desire to serve your country and your fellow subjects and countrymen. Nobody can have a greater interest or stake in the State and there is plenty of room in the State, in the various branches of the State administration and in the various grades of State service. The interests of the State and of yourselves are identical and will become more and more so in the difficult times ahead. In the State and its Ruler on the one hand, and the chiefs and nobles and the thikanas on the other, being strongly united instead of being divided, in their closest co-operation and mutual trust and confidence, as also in their united strength lies the strength of the State and the wellbeing of all classes and communities including the chiefs and nobles. Times have changed and are changing, and many of the States as well as their feudatories will at no very distant date have to face a situation which will very closely concern them both. I am not a pessimist, but any one who looks ahead or who studies what is happening in British India and what is being said about the future of the States by certain schools of political thought in British India will have no difficulty in appraising the difficult situation which is bound to arise one day. Enough harm has been done in many States through dissension and suspicion.

. . . The relations of my Government with my feudatories have, I am happy to feel, never been more cordial than they are now. See to it, sirdars of the State, that such relations are not only maintained but daily strengthened and even improved where possible. Wake up sirdars and unite with the State in the preservation of our rights and holdings, so that we may, please God, have the satisfaction not only of handing them unimpaired to our successors, but that we may also be able to feel that by our own efforts and acts we have been able, under divine assistance and guidance, to render secure all that we hold for our children's children. . . .'

A most important reform undertaken by the Maharaja during this period was the separation and direct management of the Bikaner railway system. When the Maharaja assumed his powers the length of the Bikaner railway line was only 87 miles. The experience of the great famine made him realize the vital importance of a well-planned railway system which would connect the distant portions of the State with the capital and bring the whole area into direct contact with the neighbouring provinces and the State. But the development of a railway system was no easy matter. It involved heavy capital expenditure which it was not easy to find. Construction, management, and upkeep required technical skill and experience which the State was not then in a position to command. The political difficulties were also not inconsiderable. But the Maharaja was not to be diverted by these difficulties from the path which he had set for himself. In the early days of railway development, for Bikaner itself to manage and administer the railway with its limited mileage was altogether impossible. As Jodhpur had made considerable progress in railway development the decision was taken to establish a joint system of management which was found profitable to both the governments.

While in the early stages of development this joint

administration was mutually beneficial, the increase in mileage in both the States and the schemes of expansion which were under consideration made the separation of management inevitable as time went on. From approximately 90 miles in 1898, the Bikaner railway system had increased in mileage to 568 in 1924. Also, other lines of great urgency connected with the Sutlej Valley irrigation scheme were under construction, apart from numerous projects intended to open up different areas. The mileage actually projected came to no less than 758 or 150 per cent. more than what was actually in operation. A joint management between two States was clearly unsuited to such an expanding system, which required greater personal attention than a joint manager was able to give. From the point of view of economic running also, while the mileage already existing was more than sufficient for independent management, with additional lines under construction, such a separation had become imperative. This contingency had already been foreseen in the agreement between the two States in 1912, and an agreed procedure for the separation of management had been laid down at the time.

After careful consideration, the Maharaja therefore took the decision to separate his railway administration. On the 22nd of January 1924 he addressed a personal letter to the Maharaja of Jodhpur in which he acknowledged frankly that 'the joint working of our two railways has on the whole served its purpose very well' and bore 'grateful testimony to the great help which it has been in the development of the Bikaner railway system'. The Maharaja added that the reason for his decision to separate the management was 'based on the fact that although the joint working arrangement was well adapted to the early days of railway development in the two States when the mileage of our railways was small, the position has now changed and our railway systems have so grown in length

and importance as to render it necessary for each State to assume individual responsibility for working its own railway'.

There were of course numerous technical questions which had to be settled before such a separation could be made effective, such as the apportionment of the staff, liability for joint agreements with the Government of India, the utilization of workshops before the Bikaner State could erect and equip its own workshops. The Jodhpur Government showed not only a spirit of friendship and co-operation in these difficult negotiations but accommodated the Bikaner State in every possible way, subject to their own difficulties and administrative necessities.

The major questions which required adjustment were few. One of them was the agreement between the two Governments and the British authorities for working the British Indian section of the line from the Marwar frontier to Hyderabad (Sind). The Maharaja's suggestion was that this agreement should be renewed in favour of Jodhpur alone. While the Jodhpur Government was prepared to undertake that responsibility, it naturally demanded that Bikaner should provide on existing terms such quota of stock as might be necessary for the purpose till Jodhpur could make adequate arrangements. The Maharaja willingly agreed to this suggestion as reasonable. From the point of view of Bikaner the difficulty was that in the absence of a fully equipped workshop, the new railway administration would not immediately be able to undertake the erection and repair of locomotives and rolling-stock. The Jodhpur Government undertook to meet the requirements of Bikaner in this respect until the Maharaja built and equipped workshops of his own.

The minor administrative questions to be settled involved the allocation of superior and subordinate staff, the apportionment of a provident fund, gratuities, and



other liabilities, division of rolling-stock and stores, arrangements in regard to junction stations, &c. These were technical points and at the suggestion of the Maharaja, they were referred to a Committee of one representative from each Government as the most satisfactory method of settlement. After negotiations extending over some months, these points were satisfactorily adjusted, and the separation was arranged earlier than was originally thought possible. On the 1st of November 1924 the two systems were divided, and the Maharaja saw the realization of his long-cherished ambition to own and manage a system of railways developed and worked wholly in the interests of his State.

It was, however, a disappointment to His Highness that he could not himself be present in Bikaner on this important occasion. He was on the high seas returning from his work at the League of Nations. The news of the actual taking-over reached him at Aden by a telegram of loyalty from the manager, to which the Maharaja replied expressing his hope that the separation would contribute to the successful administration of one of the most important departments and bring increased prosperity to the State. And such indeed has been the case. Within the ten years that followed the separation, the mileage of the Bikaner railways was practically doubled and the administration rendered more efficient and economical. To-day Bikaner has the largest mileage per square mile of any Indian State except Baroda (1 mile to every 35 square miles), and has perhaps the most economically and efficiently run system of railways in any Indian State. The gross earnings of the railway come to over Rs. 40 lakhs, and even in the days of extreme financial depression 1933-5, the railways paid to the State a substantial contribution to general revenues. With returning prosperity the prospects of the State railways are brighter than ever, and the Maharaja has under contemplation the

construction of other lines already projected and surveyed but held up owing to the depression and other considerations.

A railway map of Bikaner is indeed an interesting study. Radiating from the capital, a main line connects it with Bhatinda in Patiala, a distance of 260 miles to the north. Another line to Hissar in the east brings the State into direct connexion with Delhi. Towards the south runs the line going to Jodhpur. The loop-line in the canal area serves the important colony which has developed around the Gang Canal. An up-to-date and well-equipped workshop constructed at a cost of over Rs. 20 lakhs supplies the needs of this expanding system. The railway colony in Bikaner, with its roads well laid out and bungalows for officers and staff, exemplifies the personal care and consideration which the Maharaja devotes to the good administration of this most important department and the contentment of its staff.

The effect of the railway system on the life and economy of the people and in knitting together the vast area of the State into one unified whole has indeed been great. The desert kingdom which Rao Bikaji conquered and his successors consolidated was for the first time brought under a unified control. Every important district and town in the State has been connected with the capital. With the railways, telephones and telegraphs have also reached everywhere. Famine of the kind which the State suffered in 1899-1900 has been rendered impossible, and quick and cheap transport has brought the Maharaja and his Government nearer to the people in the distant villages. This achievement is all the greater as the capital expenditure involved in these vast schemes has been met either from revenue or from the internal resources of the State. The Maharaja with cautious management and careful husbanding of resources was able to undertake schemes the financing of which would have

created serious problems even for richer States. Nothing demonstrates more clearly his foresight, wisdom, and statesmanship than that in both his great undertakings, the canal scheme and the railway system, he did not have, in spite of the limited resources of his State, to depend substantially on external loans or to secure the financial help of the Government of India.

For over ten years now the Maharaja had been active in other fields. His unceasing activity had, during the War, been diverted to wider channels. Service at the Front, War Cabinet, Peace Conference, and other Imperial activities had taken up a great deal of time. With all that work he had combined also the duties of the general secretary of the Conference of Princes. From 1921, at the desire of his brother princes, he had taken up the heavy work of Chancellorship. In the result his own direct control of the administration of the State had to some extent been relaxed. As soon as the Maharaja was freed from the duties of Chancellorship, he turned his attention to the stricter control of the State machinery. He soon discovered that affairs were not to his liking; that the secretariat administration in which he had taken such pride had to some extent lost the momentum which only his own direct personal control could give to it. Deprived of his guidance and his driving power departments were apt to lose themselves in a maze of meaningless routine.

Undoubtedly there was a definite decline owing to the lack of efficient control at the top. To a man like the Maharaja, who had unremittingly toiled for the improvement of his administration, this was heart-rending. 'We are really coming to a pass', he bewails, 'when I cannot get anything done in a large number of cases; in fact almost everything I deal with seems to stop where I leave it.' The conclusion was inevitable that if the Ruler could not himself be his own Prime Minister it was necessary to

appoint some one who would take the central direction, subject to the general orders of the Maharaja. By long tradition, the Maharaja, like most other princes, disliked the appointment of a prime minister, generally an outsider, whose interests were more with the British Government, and who, with the support of the political officer, in many cases, set himself up as a rival to the ruler. But the logic of circumstances drove him to the conclusion that the only way out of the impasse which had arisen through his own increasing pre-occupations was the appointment of a prime minister. He began to realize that circumstances had changed and that the natural prejudice he had once had against a prime minister was no longer justified in the changed political conditions of the States.

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## *Chapter Thirteen*

### THE GANG CANAL

THE vast and sandy expanse of Bikaner, in the middle of the Indian desert, is perhaps the driest and the most arid portion of India. Its average rainfall is 12 inches a year, and in certain areas even less. No river flows through it: water sources are few and far between and the sand-dunes that cover the land in unbroken monotony add to the barrenness of the scene a fearsome appearance. For generations the ambition of the rulers of Bikaner had been to find some source of water-supply which would convert this barren desert into smiling fields. Maharaja Dungar Singhji had, so long ago as 1885, requested consideration of the special conditions of Bikaner. The experience of the terrible famine of 1898-9 had convinced Maharaja Ganga Singhji, in the very first year of his direct rule, that the future of Bikaner lay in having a sufficient supply of water for purposes of cultivation. And he set himself to work with single-minded devotion to gain that most prized of all his ambitions in life: to irrigate his State and get an adequate supply of water to transform at least some portions of his State into cultivable land.

During the days of the famine, Col. Dunlop Smith, who as Famine Commissioner witnessed the terrible miseries which the population and live stock of Bikaner suffered, made some gallant efforts to persuade the Government of India to undertake an irrigation scheme which would include some portion of Bikaner. The reply of the Government of India, however, gave not even a ray of hope. Though the great famine of 1899-1900 was a source of untold misery, it had at least one indirect advantage: its very magnitude was such as to awaken

the Government of India from its complacent attitude of security. It was when faced with problems of this character that the genius and vision of Lord Curzon manifested themselves. He recognized that the grim spectre of famine could never be exorcized as long as the *ryot* was dependent on a precarious and often capricious monsoon. Canal irrigation which ensured a steady supply of water to the cultivator was the only method of rendering large parts of India immune from this terror.

Irrigation in India, so far, had been taken up from regional and provincial points of view. Narrow considerations of riparian rights, local patriotism of petty-minded officials, and lack of vision on the part of the Government of India, had prevented a general policy from the point of view of the good of India as a whole. Lord Curzon's experience of the great famine convinced him that the right solution lay in taking a national view of irrigation problems, and he therefore appointed an Irrigation Commission for the purpose of devising schemes for utilizing the available water of the rivers of India as widely and as economically as possible. By this act the Government of India constituted themselves the trustees of the water rights in the whole of India, with authority to distribute the water in a manner which would bring the greatest good to the greatest number. The dog-in-the-manger policy of riparian owners was no longer possible.

Unfortunately, Lord Curzon left before the scheme which was to irrigate Bikaner could be taken in hand; and other difficulties for the State also intervened. Bikaner was not a riparian State, and Bahawalpur, as one of the owners of the Sutlej water, took the strongest possible objection to the participation of Bikaner in the irrigation scheme. It was not until 1912 that a definite scheme could be formulated, and when the proposals were worked out the Bahawalpur Council objected on the ground that the scheme, if carried out, would seriously interfere with the

existing inundation canals, and further that the proposal to include Bikaner was based on a serious under-estimate, by as much as 50 per cent., of the irrigable area in Bahawalpur. It was, in fact, argued that the Sutlej supply was barely sufficient for Bahawalpur itself, and that therefore the inclusion of Bikaner amounted to an expropriation of the rights of Bahawalpur, whose future interests, it was claimed, would for ever be jeopardized by the allocation of a share in Sutlej water to Bikaner. The scheme of 1905 contemplated the construction of headworks much higher up than was actually decided upon later, and it would have commanded a much greater area in Bikaner. The Bahawalpur Council was adamant on this point. It protested that the scheme was completely opposed to the interests of Bahawalpur State and requested that it might be excused from participating in the scheme, in which it was proposed to divert about one-third of the river supply to Bikaner—a non-riparian State with no legal rights to any part of the water.

‘I would beg leave to submit for consideration’, added the President of the Bahawalpur Council, ‘since it has been clearly established that a far greater supply of perennial water than is available is required for the irrigation of the lands of Bahawalpur—a riparian State with full rights to the same—that no part of the supply under this or any other project is surplus and available for transfer to Bikaner—a State with no legal rights to any part of the supply.’

As a further complication, the Bahawalpur State was then under a regency and the Council did not fail to make full use of this fact. ‘The Chief of Bahawalpur is now a voiceless minor’, they appealed, and completed the picture of David and Goliath by adding: ‘The minor Nawab’s opponent is the Maharaja of Bikaner, in the full zenith of his power, with probably considerable influence with those who can influence the decision, if carried out on the lines of executive convenience.’

The Maharaja did not have much difficulty in disproving the arguments of the Bahawalpur Council. The representation of Bikaner put the matter on higher grounds. The argument that there were great irrigable lands in Bahawalpur was shown to be wrong on the basis of impartial inquiry by competent British officers,<sup>1</sup> and that Bahawalpur's objection was untenable. With every new scheme, Bahawalpur had protested with ever increasing vigour, putting its claim higher and higher each time. In response to Bahawalpur's objections the project of 1905, which commanded nearly 18 lakhs of acres in Bikaner, was reduced in 1913 to 6,40,000 acres, and in the project of 1914 to 5,00,000. The Maharaja naturally viewed with great alarm this progressive reduction of command and irrigation in successive proposals, and pointed out that, 'judged by every criterion—liability to famine, the excellent quality of the land to be irrigated (3,300 square miles of the north-western area which could be commanded by the Sutlej waters consisting of level loam of the highest quality and an ideal country for irrigation) the difficulty experienced by the Punjab and the neighbouring areas from large-scale emigration in times of scarcity—the Bikaner State was more suited to irrigation than Bahawalpur'. As for the rights of riparian States, the Maharaja claimed that the paramount power was 'in duty bound to make use of those waters in the manner most beneficial to the interests of India and to the best advantage of the varying interests'.

In 1903 the Maharaja, who had long dreamed of a great irrigation scheme which would irrigate the north-

<sup>1</sup> Later events clearly justified the Maharaja's contention. Sir George Schuster, Finance Member to the Government of India, speaking in the Indian Legislative Assembly on the 29th of March 1934 said, 'the main cause of the loss (to Bahawalpur) of money in connexion with the project is the fact that Bahawalpur State in order to secure to itself a large share of the waters of the Sutlej and in order to prevent rivals—either another Indian State or the Punjab Government—from claiming a larger share of those waters grossly overstated the area which was fit for irrigation and cultivation.'



western portion of his State, secured the services of Mr. A. W. E. Standley as chief engineer. Mr. Standley, who was a brilliant irrigation engineer, inquired at the instance of the Maharaja into the possibilities of irrigation in the State and demonstrated the feasibility of irrigating Bikaner lands from the Sutlej. Mr. Standley's suggestions received strong support from Sir Swinton Jacob, who was then consulting irrigation engineer for Rajputana. The Government of India was moving along the same lines. In 1905 Mr. R. G. Kennedy drew up the first Sutlej Valley project, and the Maharaja, anxious not to lose this opportunity, went up to Simla and explained his case personally to Lord Curzon. He was uncertain of the attitude of the Viceroy, but feared strenuous opposition to any claims on behalf of Bikaner from the officials of the Punjab. He hoped that the Viceroy would be sympathetic, for he knew from experience that if Lord Curzon could be persuaded of the justness of a claim the opposition of provincial Governments on technical grounds would not count with him. It was in the hope of converting the Viceroy and, with his help, of persuading the Punjab Government that the Maharaja went up to Simla. There he met with a pleasant surprise. Far from meeting with opposition from the Punjab and the Government of India, the Maharaja found that, thanks to the policy of Lord Curzon, the scheme, as drawn up in outline and approved by the Government of India, included a considerable area in the north of his State. The Maharaja returned full of hope, knowing that his long-cherished ambition would one day be realized.

The protest of Bahawalpur was a serious obstacle, but the policy laid down by Sir Denzil Ibbetson, who was then Governor of the Punjab, that the criterion was whether the water should be used to the best advantage of the people of India without regard to the accident of their being subjects of an Indian Prince or in British

territory, was finally upheld and the participation of Bikaner was decided upon.

Though the decision to have a Sutlej Valley irrigation scheme was originally taken in 1906, it was not till 1912 that a definite scheme was accepted. For the Maharaja, who had come back in 1905 with high hopes that the work would be finished in seven or eight years, this delay was a source of natural anxiety and alarm. In 1912, when a scheme was accepted, he thought that now at last the work would proceed. But again his hopes were dashed to the ground. The Government of India would not be hurried. Long and interminable arguments on the merits and demerits of different projects took up time. The Punjab Government also became rather unsympathetic and as far as Bahawalpur was concerned, with every year, as has been said before, its attitude stiffened still further. Year after year passed without the work being taken in hand. In the meantime the War also intervened and all expensive schemes had to be laid aside. It was on the 4th of September 1920, fully fifteen years after the scheme had been accepted in principle, that, through the liberal attitude of Sir Michael O'Dwyer and the Government of India, the momentous agreement was signed between the Punjab, Bahawalpur, and Bikaner, under which the scheme was definitely accepted by the three Governments. It was the twentieth scheme that was actually sent up to the Secretary of State for sanction. When the final scheme came before the Secretary of State, the Maharaja began devising ways and means for putting the scheme into effect. It was when a detailed estimate was worked out that the difficulties of the scheme became apparent. The Maharaja had in his service a man much to his heart, to whom obstacles were there only to be surmounted, and who saw in this scheme a great and noble work by which he could benefit the State which he was serving. Mr. G. D. Rudkin, who had been the Revenue

Commissioner and later Revenue Member of the Maharaja's Government from 1912, was an exceptional personality. Gifted with unusual energy, great vision, and the gift of great attention to detail, he made the irrigation scheme his own special concern.

The problems which faced the Maharaja and the Revenue Minister were peculiar to his State. The area which it was intended to irrigate was a level plain of lightest loam where the water level was about 180 feet below the surface. The average rainfall was only 6 inches in the south-west, gradually decreasing as the distance from the Himalayas lengthened. The soil is very fertile, but the main problem was the absorption of water by the parched desert. Owing to fear of water-logging in British Indian territory, through 71 miles of which the Canal had to run, it also had to be concrete lined, which added considerably to the cost. There were also intricate problems of land tenure. Though there were practically no *jagir* grants in the area, much of the land had been allowed to be occupied during the settlement operations of 1908-9 for payment of land revenue. Many outsiders who were aware of the canal project took up lands on speculation, with the result that the State lands in this area, which in 1904 amounted to 4,500,000 acres, had shrunk by 1909-10 to 70,000 acres, and by 1912 there was little left to the State. This short-sighted policy squandered the capital value of unoccupied State lands and rendered well-ordered colonization schemes difficult. When the scheme seemed to be within reasonable distance of realization, the Maharaja and his Government were faced with the serious problem of utilizing the capital value of the land to pay for the irrigation scheme and at the same time to deal fairly with the new-comers. These new occupants did not possess proprietary rights, and the State possessed the right of resumption in certain specified circumstances. The problem bristled with diffi-

culties. If the new occupants, who in many cases had built houses, &c., were to be expropriated on legal grounds, the State would lay itself open to the charge of a serious breach of faith, which might have disastrous results in the future when colonists would have to be invited to settle on the land. On the other hand, it was equally unfair that the State should be unable to make the irrigation scheme really profitable by being prevented from securing the full capital value of any of its lands which had been seized only a few years before and whose occupants did not possess proprietary rights.

The first action of the Maharaja's Government, once they were aware of the problem, was to stop all further encroachment. The next step was a classification of land as cultivated and waste, and the resumption of waste lands in exchange for occupancy rights on the cultivated lands. The cultivators received a permanent tenure with defined rights over the areas they held, and the State resumed the waste lands in which no efforts at cultivation had been made by the new-comers. In order to see that no petty oppression or grave injustice took place, the Maharaja entrusted Mr. Rudkin personally with the conduct of this inquiry and the grant of occupancy rights. The policy followed by Mr. Rudkin, which had the complete approval of His Highness, was that the circumstances of every individual holding, as regards cultivation, permanent residence in the State, and the method by which the land was acquired, should first be thoroughly inquired into in order that the State subjects might be treated more generously with regard to their waste lands than the new-comers, and those new-comers who had settled in the State more generously than those who had not. The scheme met with success, and both the occupiers and the State were pleased with the compromise: the State because it was able to acquire the waste lands, and the tenants because, in exchange for the land which was

of no value if the irrigation scheme did not go through, they received permanent rights over their cultivated holdings.

The next question was the financing of the project. The original estimate of Mr. Rudkin was for Rs. 2,01,21,121. The revised estimate came to 3 crores of rupees, or nearly 2½ million pounds. The indirect expenditure involving, among other things, the construction of a loop-line some 157 miles in length to open up the canal area, and the establishment of *mandis*, schools, hospitals, police stations, and other public institutions, was no less heavy. To meet an expenditure of over 4 million pounds in a period of five years is a strain on any government. The conditions of Indian States render the financing of an undertaking involving so vast a sum very difficult. Outside loans, even for productive purposes, ordinarily involve political control. Financial help by the Government of India, as the Maharaja knew from the experience of other States, meant interference in the internal economy of the State. On the other hand, to meet this enormous expenditure either from accumulated balances or from revenue was a total impossibility. The sale of the waste land in the Canal colony was one source of income, but that was insufficient to meet the entire cost. But neither the Maharaja nor his Government were disheartened by these difficulties. They were determined to finance their project without going to the public market. The credit of the State stood so high that when it came to be known that the Maharaja's Government was desirous of raising a loan, financiers, both from inside and outside the State, came forward and advanced the necessary funds as short term loans at rates which compared very favourably with the rates paid by the Government of India itself. The total amount so raised for the actual work of the Canal and subsidiary projects was Rs. 2,36,00,000.

It is characteristic of the Maharaja that even the *kankar*,

or limestone, required for the concrete lining of the canal was brought from quarries within the State by the Bikaner State railways. The utilization of the State's own resources whenever possible, in all his undertakings, has always been a principle of the Maharaja. Though the *kankar* in this case had to be brought from a distance of over 200 miles and the cost would have been prohibitive but for the fact that the State railways carried it, the Maharaja wisely preferred to use it rather than buy the material from outside.

The confidence of the general public in the administration of the State and the personality of the Ruler was such that among those who had purchased land in advance a large proportion came from the British areas in the Punjab. No class of cultivators in India is more shrewd, more thrifty, or more hard-working than those of the Punjab. These hardheaded and sturdy cultivators are the last people to put their money or stake their future on doubtful propositions. There is a general belief in India that *ryots* in British areas are so apprehensive of the personal rule in Indian States that nothing short of physical compulsion would make them migrate to an Indian State. The experience of the Bikaner colony should show that when the administration of the State is such as to ensure confidence, and the Ruler is known to be interested in the welfare of his people, the Indian State has attractions for the *ryot* which British India perhaps does not offer.

The entire work was completed by the autumn of 1927. On the 26th of October the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, came in person to open the Canal which was named after the Maharaja the Gang Canal, and the occasion was celebrated in a manner befitting the importance of the event in the history of Bikaner. His Majesty King George V himself was pleased to send a cablegram to the Maharaja, in which His Majesty stated:

‘I have received with much pleasure your telegram informing me that your ambition cherished for so many years has at last been realised and that the Viceroy will open the Gang Canal next week. I heartily congratulate you on this memorable achievement and on the success of the efforts which have surmounted all difficulties to ensure the benefits of irrigation to a portion of your territory. You may rest assured that I shall ever follow with interest the continued progress of this important undertaking so vital to the health and wellbeing of your State.’

Many princes and high dignitaries had come from far and near to rejoice with His Highness in the completion of this great and noble work. The Rathore Princes had gathered in strength. The Maharaja of Jodhpur, forgetting ancient feuds, came personally with his brother to congratulate his kinsman. If historical imagination could go back, the two descendants of Rao Jodhaji could well remember with thanks the day when Rao Bikaji with his gallant band left the ancestral home to carve out a kingdom for himself. The fulfilment of that great adventure came fully truly on the 26th of October 1927, when no less than a thousand square miles of the area of the State Rao Bikaji founded was being converted from desert lands into green and pleasant fields. The Maharaja of Kishengarh and the Raja of Sitamau, younger branches of the same illustrious line, were also present. The Maharao of Kotah, with his son, soon to be allied to the House of Bikaner, the Maharaja of Datia, Maharaja Ranjit Singhji, Jam of Nawanagar and the celebrated Ranji of the cricket field, the Nawab of Palanpur and his heir-apparent, the Maharaj-Rana of Wankaner, the Rana of Danta, the Nawab Regent of Loharu, the Rao Saheb of Alipura, and the heir apparent of Benares were among the other Princes who attended the function. British India was no less suitably represented. The venerable Pandit Malaviya, the veteran nationalist leader and founder and Vice-Chancellor of

the Benares Hindu University, Sir Bhupendra Nath Mitra, later High Commissioner for India in London, and Mr. S. R. Das, the Law Member of the Government of India, represented the sympathy of the British Indian people and the greetings of the Government of India. Nor were high British officers unrepresented. Sir Malcolm (now Lord) Hailey, Governor of the Punjab, and Sir Clement Hindley, the President of the Railway Board, were among those who at the Maharaja's invitation had come to the historic function. The Political Secretary, Mr. C. C. (later Sir Charles) Watson, had naturally accompanied the Viceroy. The only regret the Maharaja felt was that his old tutor and friend, Sir Brian Egerton, who had with such affectionate interest watched the rise to greatness of his former pupil, could not be present owing to ill health. But the Egerton family was not left unrepresented. Sir Philip Grey-Egerton, the head of the family, had himself come to Bikaner for the purpose of attending the function.

It was in the presence of this distinguished gathering that Lord Irwin opened the flood-gates, which were to release the perennial flow of plenty and prosperity to the State.

The Maharaja was indeed a proud man on that day. The ambition that he first cherished over twenty-eight years before when he witnessed the terrible miseries of the famine of 1899 had been fulfilled. The way had not always been smooth; opposition had to be overcome, difficulties had to be surmounted, finance had to be provided, an infinity of details had to be worked out. At one time he had almost despaired of seeing his cherished scheme realized in his own lifetime: the delays and difficulties—there were over twenty schemes discussed before the final one was approved—were such as would have broken the spirit of a lesser man. But the Maharaja never gave up hope. With unsurpassed patience he waited, perfecting



the details, providing the finances, allotting the land, and generally making himself ready to derive the maximum advantage when the scheme materialized. The result was that when the 'desert but fertile plains, parched with eternal thirst, unslaked from hoary antiquity' received the life-giving flow, the cultivators were ready, each in his own allotted plot, to take advantage of the water and begin cultivation.

The whole scheme of colonization of the area which was to be irrigated by the canals was a triumph of organization. The available plots had been allotted and sold long in advance. The colony called after the Maharaja was organized in every detail; its head-quarters laid out, its *mandis* planned, its villages occupied. The railway line, the main arterial roads, the necessary institutions were all ready. The cultivator was literally waiting with his plot prepared, lacking only the water to commence cultivation. There was no wastage, no delay. Everything was perfectly planned and when the sluice was opened and the water flowed into the concrete-lined canal, the new life burst forth, as if by magic, in the desert land which had not known the music of running water for hundreds of years. In a flash the Gang Canal Colony had come into existence.

It was not a small area but nearly 1,000 square miles—the size of a fairly large State in India—that was thus brought under irrigation. It was in fact nothing less than the creation of a new State, planned according to modern lines, and based on a different economy from that to which the Bikaner State had so long been accustomed. There was no more fear of famine because the State now had its own granary, not dependent on precarious rainfall, and its own railway system which could carry grain to any part of the State. When the Maharaja in those heart-rending days of 1899–1900 vowed that if it lay in his power he would rescue Bikaner from the terrible scourge of famine and the sense of

insecurity that comes from it, he could hardly have hoped to see so complete a fulfilment as he witnessed on that historic day, and he was entitled to take justifiable pride that through his efforts and in his own lifetime he had achieved a programme in the planning and working out of which, so far as it concerned his own State, no one else was in any degree responsible.

The working of the scheme has more than fulfilled his expectations. In spite of the catastrophic fall in prices in the years of the great depression, the Gang Colony showed steady progress. A few figures may be given here to show the general effects of the scheme. Of the total capital cost of Rs. 299 lakhs, capital receipts from the sale of lands already amount to over Rs. 280 lakhs. Thus the capital outlay has been almost covered and the scheme has not cost the State anything from revenue. In spite of the increase in capital expenditure and drop in revenue, the canal has paid for its construction and has up to date earned a net profit of over Rs. 10 lakhs for the State. Even during the bad year 1934-5 the canal paid 3.77 per cent. On the facts of the last nine years, exceptional because of the depression, the canal, considered merely as a financial proposition, has paid the State a reasonable revenue.

Since the opening of the canal over 500 new villages have come into existence. They were all planned and built on systematic lines with proper roads, drinking-wells, and other amenities of village life. The population, as a result, jumped from a bare 28,000 in 1921 to 145,259 in 1931 and 180,000 in 1934. The phenomenal increase in population and the development of cultivation have resulted in the establishment of suitable marketing centres, which have grown into important trading towns. The most flourishing among them, Ganganagar, called after the Maharaja, although only six years old, compares well with the long-established canal marketing centres in

the Punjab in respect to population, trade, and industries. Along with this, considerable industrial development has also taken place. Four ginning-factories, three pressing-factories, and two sugar-factories have already sprung up in the canal area. More than a dozen flour-mills and many oil-extractors are in operation. These are by no means confined to the towns, for the more progressive villages in the canal area have established oil-extractors and flour-mills.

The Government of the Maharaja has not rested content with the opening of the canal. The Maharaja recognized from the beginning that the State would have to help the cultivators by making available to them modern scientific assistance and organization if the canal area were to flourish according to expectations. In 1928, a year after the canal was opened, the Maharaja established at Ganganagar an experimental farm for conducting scientific experiments in regard to crops cultivated in the colony. Very valuable experiments have been conducted with different types of seeds and the results have been made available free to the cultivators. An agricultural farm has been established which also supplies the *ryots* with good varieties of seeds. A cotton laboratory conducts experiments on the seeds of this crop, which is one of the staple products in the area. These activities of the Government have already produced beneficent results, and consequently a larger yield per acre is now realized than was anticipated in the beginning.

Easy credit facilities have also been created in the colony. Co-operative societies for the purpose of advancing money at easy rates have been established with the support of the Government.

To bring under cultivation at one time an area of no less than a thousand square miles, with a population which increased from 28,000 to 180,000 in seven years meant really the organization of a new State. The adminis-

trative problems with which the Maharaja had to deal taxed the ability of his Government and deeply interested him personally. Problems of education, sanitation, administration of law and justice, and control of *mandis* had to be undertaken at one and the same time. The majority of the population came from the Punjab, where the towns enjoyed municipal self-government. They were accustomed in some degree to look after their own civic affairs. Local affairs of the districts were under the control of district boards. The Maharaja wisely decided to govern his new subjects according to the principles to which they had so long been accustomed. The main townships in the canal area were therefore given municipalities on an elective basis with the same powers as those enjoyed by municipalities in neighbouring British areas. A district board was also established on the British Indian model, and it has since taken in hand a scheme for starting schools, opening rural dispensaries, and constructing roads. The board has established over thirty schools in important villages. Nor has the Maharaja's Government been tardy in doing their part in these activities. The Government is opening a high school in Ganganagar and has a scheme for raising the primary schools in all the *mandis* to middle schools. Similarly in each of the four canal *tehsils* dispensaries have been opened with a central hospital at Ganganagar, the head-quarters of the colony.

From the beginning the Maharaja realized that the administration of the canal area, with its new and unfamiliar problems, should be under a special officer with knowledge of colonization methods which had long been tried and perfected in the Punjab. He therefore created a special post of Colonization Minister so that all questions connected with the colony might come up to him with as little intervention by others as possible. Comparisons are odious but it may be remarked without

offence that neither the British area nor the Bahawalpur State which is served by the same canals has made the colonization of the irrigated lands the success that it undoubtedly has been in Bikaner. In Bahawalpur a large percentage of the land meant to be irrigated has not yet been sold. In the British area depression wrought such havoc that the scheme cannot yet be pronounced an unqualified success. But in Bikaner, though the supply of water during the sowing-periods of cotton and sugar-cane often fell considerably short and was wholly insufficient in 1929 and 1932, and though the estimated cost had been exceeded by one half, the scheme was not only made to pay reasonably as an investment, but was an undoubted success from the point of view of the cultivator. Even during the worst days of the depression when generous remission and timely suspension of revenue had to be given, land in the canal colony was always in demand, and the cultivators, aware of the great solicitude of the Ruler and the interest of his Government, never lost heart or faith in the future of the colony.

It is not a characteristic of the Maharaja to rest content with his achievements. The fact that he was able successfully to irrigate an area of about 1,000 square miles and bring water to one portion of his territory, though a matter of profound gratification to him, did not quench his ambition for other achievements on the same lines. To reach constantly forward is an inalienable quality of the human mind, especially of those anxious to serve their fellow men; and no sooner was the Sutlej Valley scheme completed than the Maharaja pressed for another project for utilizing the water from the Bhakra Dam in Bilaspur State to irrigate another 2,000 square miles in the northern area of the State. Practically the whole of the northern portion of the State could be brought under irrigation if the Bhakra Dam project, which is now on the waiting list of the Punjab irrigation schemes, could

be successfully undertaken. So far as Bikaner is concerned this scheme involves much greater expense than the Sutlej Valley scheme, not only as the area it would serve would be double that of the Gang Canal Colony, but because the capital expenditure on headworks and the expenses of compensating the State of Bilaspur, which will suffer loss by the construction of the dam, are likely to be very heavy. But the Maharaja, having paid off last year (1936) the last instalment of his internal loan, thanks to his intimate personal knowledge of irrigation and colonization problems can look forward without hesitation or concern to the problem of financing such a scheme without undue strain on the resources of the State.

Owing to various circumstances the scheme is still only under consideration, and it is likely that it will take some more years before the work is actually taken in hand. But whenever this work is taken up—whether in the immediate or in the distant future—Bikaner State will be ready to participate in it to the fullest possible extent. For the Maharaja cherishes the ambition to see this scheme materialize in his own lifetime. In imagination he sees the glorious vista of prosperous towns, flourishing villages, busy factories, colonies of hardy and industrious peasants, in the barren and forbidding desert, where the water-courses dried up thousands of years ago. Scarcely a tree is visible for long distances there now; human life in the few villages spread over these many square miles is now a hard fight against nature based on a fatalistic dependence on a precarious monsoon. Amenities of life are few; even the cattle suffer in the hot summer months for lack of water and deficiency of fodder. What greater ambition can there be for a Ruler who loves the territory that his ancestors won for him, than to provide the one element necessary for the transformation of all this area into pleasant and prosperous lands?

In ancient Hindu tradition there is the story of a king, Bhagiratha, who spent his life in a successful effort to bring down the Ganges from heaven for the benefit of his people. By severe austerities and by great perseverance he won the favour of the river goddess, who at his request agreed to water the valleys of Hindustan. No doubt it represents an ancient tradition of irrigation, of a noble and successful effort to divert the waters of the Ganges for great irrigation-works. In any case Bhagiratha's name is to this day held in almost divine veneration as that of a great monarch who brought the water of the holy river to his people. What wonder that the people of Bikaner should show equal reverence to Maharaja Ganga Singhji, who from far distance brought to his parching and ever thirsty land water sufficient to irrigate a thousand square miles, and in his own lifetime witnessed the wonderful transformation of the desert into ploughed fields and smiling gardens.

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## Chapter Fourteen

1926-1932

### THE BUTLER COMMITTEE AND THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

IN 1922, when the Maharaja was in England on a holiday, he was requested by Lord Peel, then Secretary of State for India, to be a member of the Indian delegation to the League of Nations. For personal reasons he was then unable to accept that invitation, but when the same invitation was renewed in 1924 the Maharaja felt bound to accept it. It was a matter of some satisfaction to him as one of the statesmen who had signed the Covenant which had brought that body into existence to take part in its actual work. His Highness's colleagues in the delegation were Lord Hardinge, whom the Maharaja justifiably described as 'that most beloved and popular of our past Viceroys', and the late Sir Mahommed Rafique, an eminent jurist and scholar from the United Provinces. The Maharaja had as his chief secretary Sir Stanley Reed, and the heir-apparent accompanied him as a substitute delegate.

The League Assembly in 1924 was an exceptionally important one. It met under the shadow of the abortive Italian occupation of Corfu, the try-out and rehearsal of the violation of Abyssinia which was to take place eleven years later. The grim fact which dominated the Assembly was that Italy in clear defiance of her obligation under the Covenant had bombarded and occupied the island of Corfu, and, unless the League, which had been established 'to secure international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war', was able to maintain its authority, its very *raison d'être* would have



vanished. It was in a tense atmosphere that the Assembly met.

In the work of the Assembly the Maharaja took his full share. The draft treaty of mutual assistance which tried to link disarmament with guarantees for the security of States was the main political question before the Assembly. The British Government considered the proposals indefinite and vague, and the guarantees which the draft treaty contained to be illusory. The Maharaja, who spoke on behalf of India during the general discussion, agreed with the principle of arbitration in international matters, but indicated the special considerations arising out of the geographical position of India which must govern the attitude of the Government towards any proposal for the reduction of armaments. These difficulties, inherent in the frontier problem of India, cannot be solved by the use of economic sanctions (which have been found to be ineffective even against industrialized Powers) or by the spread of the principle of arbitration. To have accepted on the ground of the vague idealism of the League a reduction of the armies which keep peace on India's frontier would indeed have been suicidal. And yet the Maharaja was attacked in the Indian press for opposing the reduction of the military forces in India. All that the Maharaja said was :

'In India, we have a frontier problem of exceptional difficulty and complexity. Our border line stretches from the Indian Ocean near Karachi to the confines of China and Siam. Much of that frontier is peopled by hardy and turbulent tribes, owning no law but the blood feud, no higher ambition than to raid the peaceful dwellers of the plains. These tribes are well supplied with arms and ammunitions imported from Europe, and despite costly preventive measures this illicit traffic has, as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald told us, not yet been brought fully under control. They contain within their clans some of the finest fighting material in the world. Other sections of the

frontier consist of dense and almost pathless jungles occupied by restless tribes, who, if they have not the exceptional military qualities of those on the North-West, are nevertheless a considerable military preoccupation. Not in our time can the serious menace to the security of India contained in the frontier position be mitigated by the use of economic sanctions, or the spread of the principle of arbitration. We are bound to take account of it in fixing our standard of military strength at the minimum point which will ensure the safety of India.'

By no stretch of the imagination could this be called a militarist utterance, intended to strengthen the forces of British Imperialism in India. The nationalist press in India, however, pretended to see in it a deep-laid plot to increase the military expenditure and to strengthen the British Army in India.

The other important question in which the Maharaja was directly concerned as a member of the Third Committee was the representation of India on the international health organizations. It was a general complaint in India that while India's contribution to the expenses of the League was heavy, the benefits she derived were disproportionately small. The public health organizations which had been established by the League had devoted their activities exclusively to Russia and eastern Europe. They had undoubtedly done excellent work in those areas. But India, which more than even those States has been subject to epidemics of all kinds, both local and imported, had no representation on those organizations, with the result that no attention was devoted to its public-health problems. The Maharaja, who was India's representative on the committee, took up the question on behalf of India. After pointing out the sufferings which India had undergone in the past through the ravages of epidemic diseases and the contribution that India has made to the study of special diseases, the Maharaja argued that the country had 'such tremendous issues at stake that

she has a right to be constantly considered in any measures that are taken to study and control epidemic disease', and further, that the work of the League would itself gain in efficiency and experience if it were kept in contact with the great store of experience that India had accumulated. As a result of the stand taken by him, the committee passed at his suggestion a resolution requiring the Health Organization to communicate its programme as well as a report of its activities to the International Health Office in Paris, established by the Rome Convention of 1907, on which India is represented. This resolution gave India a voice in determining the public-health policy of the League of Nations which was indeed an important achievement.

It will be clear that the Maharaja's membership of the Indian delegation was not merely decorative or ornamental. Mr. Wickham Steed, the famous publicist and former editor of *The Times*, who was present at Geneva as an interested witness to the proceedings of the Assembly, thus describes in the *Review of Reviews* of November and December 1924 the impression created by the Maharaja's appearance at the session.

#### 'Scene II.

"The Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva. Date : September, 6th 1924. The President, M. Motta, announces "The Maharaja of Bikaner, delegate of India, will address the Assembly". Complimentary applause from the Assembly. The same tall, soldierly figure as at the Peace Conference, but dressed in a simple well-cut lounge suit, ascends the tribune, bows to the President and begins to speak. Reminiscent of other British oratory, the Assembly resigns itself to an expected flood of "uplifting" exhortation. Its resignation quickly gives place to attention, and attention to admiration. Clear, brief, to the point, matter-of-fact yet elevated, the Maharaja soon convinces his hearers that he knows what he is saying, means what he says, and says what he means. Ten minutes later he descends from

the tribune—amid rousing applause markedly different in quality from the initial greeting. He had made the best of all the English speeches at the Assembly.’

After finishing his work at Geneva, the Maharaja spent a fortnight in London renewing contacts with friends and watching with interest the political developments that were taking place.

The Maharaja had expected that with his retirement from the Chancellorship in 1926 he would be able to devote more time to the administration of the State. His constant preoccupation with the affairs of the States in general and with the public affairs of British India and the Empire had left him but little time to attend to the details of administration, and, as we saw before, this had led to a decline in administrative efficiency. It was also not possible to anticipate that the Maharaja, who had developed such wide interests, would be able to devote the same time as before to the details of State administration. In the circumstances his decision to appoint an experienced official as his Prime Minister was undoubtedly a wise one. The person chosen for this post was Sir Manubhai Nandshankar Mehta, Kt., C.S.I. Sir Manubhai was one of the best-known personalities in the service of the Indian States and had served the Maharaja of Baroda in different capacities for over thirty years. During the last ten years of his service in Baroda Sir Manubhai was Prime Minister, and had in that capacity participated in all the discussions which led to the establishment of the Chamber of Princes and in the subsequent activities of that body. From the personal point of view also the choice was unexceptionable. Honest and hard-working and of a retiring disposition, Sir Manubhai was held in high esteem by the Princes and Ministers of Indian States. He brought to his task a thorough knowledge of economic and administrative problems and practised skill in the negotiation

of complicated questions. With his appointment as Prime Minister in 1927, the Maharaja hoped that he would obtain relief from much of the burden of internal administration and expert assistance in dealing with public questions which were daily becoming more and more important.

The political conditions in India at the time were perceptibly moving towards a serious crisis. When Lord Reading laid down the reins of viceroyalty in April 1926, there was no section of people in India which was politically contented. The princes were alarmed by the comprehensive and to them incomprehensible claims which the Viceroy had put forward in his famous letter to the Nizam of Hyderabad. That pronouncement, in which the logical conclusions of the theory of paramountcy were worked out relentlessly, had left the Princes of India totally bewildered. Action against individual Princes like the venerated Maharana Fateh Singhji of Udaipur had also made the princes apprehensive. If princely India was discontented and sullen, British India was openly hostile and almost in revolt. The disunity between Hindus and Muslims had weakened the Congress movement, but in its place terrorist activities had again begun to show themselves. The Congress party had secured a majority of elected seats in the Central Assembly and was insistently demanding further reforms. It was becoming increasingly clear that a new instalment of reforms for India, more radical in character and more far-reaching in effect, could not be delayed much longer.

In the circumstances the Princes once again pressed for an immediate examination of their rights *vis-à-vis* the British Government. Very justifiably they claimed that, with every step in political advance in British India, their rights and privileges guaranteed by treaties and engagements were likely to suffer diminution in the vague and undefined character in which their relationship with the

Crown stood at that time. In fact, it was even asserted that their relationship was not with the Crown at all but with the Government of India: that their treaties had no validity: that the overriding authority said to rest in the Government of India limited whatever sovereignty they possessed. This was the orthodox view of the British Indian jurists, who looked forward to the time when they would, by a kind of apostolic succession, exercise the functions and powers of paramountcy over the Indian States. Lord Irwin, the new Viceroy, it was known, was seriously considering the question of expediting the promised inquiry into the working of reforms in India. The Princes therefore felt that the time had arrived when an inquiry into their own rights should not be postponed. Lord Irwin was found to be more sympathetic towards the idea than his predecessor had been, and he agreed to discuss the whole question with the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes. At the informal conference held in Simla in June 1927 the Maharaja as a member of the Standing Committee played a leading part, and the Viceroy agreed, after the discussion, to recommend to the Secretary of State that a committee should be appointed to inquire into the whole question of the relationship of the Indian States with the paramount Power.

Thus was the famous Indian States Inquiry Committee (the Butler Committee) appointed. The Maharaja realized that much work remained to be done on their side if the inquiry was to bear fruit. With the co-operation of His Highness the Chancellor (the Maharaja of Patiala) he therefore called a conference of princes and ministers at Bikaner in the winter of 1927 to discuss both the procedure of dealing with the problems arising from the appointment of this Committee and the formulation of the views of the princes to be placed before it. This Committee, which was attended by some of the most

distinguished ministers of Indian States, laid down the general scheme of the princes' case as it was intended to be placed before the committee. The Maharaja himself defined in the following words the attitude which the Bikaner Conference adopted and which was elaborated at later meetings :

'The fundamental standpoint of the States is that they ask for a full and effective recognition of all their existing rights—whatever they may be. By their existing rights are meant those existing rights—to use the term in the most general sense possible—to which they are truly entitled—whether they are to-day in actual enjoyment of them or not. They do not ask any more than their existing rights; and if justice is to be done to the States, then the States are entitled to demand that they ought not to be, and cannot be, offered less—from any quarter. If the rights of the States can be truly ascertained, the Princes will be satisfied with that ascertainment. On that basis, it will then be possible to consider the conduct of the relations of the States with British India and the Crown and for the States, the Butler Committee, the British Government, and all those concerned, including the public, to form a wise judgement as to what alterations it is politic and wise to make in daily practice in the relations of the States with the Crown and British India and what proposals are wise for the future. The view of the States is that whatever proposals there may be for the adjustment of relations, they should be based on the true recognition of the rights of the States, provide for their due preservation, and at the same time contain suitable machinery for reasonable harmonious and successful co-operation between the two sides of India—the States side and the British India side. That, I think, summarizes the attitude which, it is proposed by the Standing Committee, the princes should take up before the Butler Committee.'

The members of the Committee visited Bikaner and were entertained, shown over the city, and generally fêted. The special point of the States' case was also discussed with them by the Maharaja and his Prime Minister. The

Maharaja wisely recognized that the problem was not entirely one of emphasizing rights and privileges. Conditions in India had changed, and there was a considerable section of public opinion which stressed the duties and obligations of the princes to their people. Various events during the recent past had brought the internal administration of the States and the private conduct of rulers prominently before the public, and the opinion had gained ground that while the princes were anxious to enforce their rights against the British Government, as against their own people they recognized no obligations or duties; that good government was of no concern to them; that their interest lay in securing as much of the State revenue as possible for their own personal pleasures. The problem of the internal reform of the States came therefore to be necessarily correlated to the reassertion of their sovereign rights. The Maharaja faced this issue boldly. He recognized that in the varying conditions of Indian States there were not a few which were backward in their administration and where the rulers were not wholly alive to their responsibilities. Both in the Bikaner Legislative Assembly and in the Chamber of Princes, he spoke with extreme candour on the theme that the strength of the princes can come only from the quality of their internal administration, from the love and affection in which their subjects hold them. No one realized more than he, that treaties and other guarantees cannot protect a ruler who forgets the elementary obligations of his own position, that the readjustment of the machinery of Imperial relationship, however favourable to the States, cannot help to perpetuate gross misgovernment and oppression where they exist. Side by side with increased power, therefore, there must come into existence a better realization of the obligations of the princes to their own people.

This could not mean and was not meant to indicate



that the entire paraphernalia of democratic government should be introduced into the States. His own experience as a ruler for over twenty-eight years had convinced the Maharaja that, in the monarchical traditions of the Indian States, what was required was not the immediate establishment of popular institutions but the acceptance of certain fundamental principles of good government and of the obligations and duties of the rulers to their subjects.

'They form', the Maharaja declared to his Assembly, 'the hallmark of every State worthy of being ranked as enlightened and progressive, and these to my mind are the essential preliminaries—the minima—which can inspire the general confidence of the public both within and without his territories, and which any ruler (or State) should aspire to who wishes to put his house in order and to bear the fierce light which beats upon a throne.'

These minima he defined as :

1. A fixed and well-defined privy purse and a clear dividing line between State and personal expenditure.
2. Security of life and property.
3. Independent judiciary.
4. The reign of law, including certainty of law.
5. Stability of public services.
6. Efficiency and continuity of administration.
7. Beneficent rule in the interests of the general well-being of the people.

These seven points, the Maharaja emphasized, did not differ from the Hindu ideals of kingship.

'I do not forget that at some places a king is described therein as embodying within him the spark of divinity, but that spark is also hedged round with, and cased within a sheath of, stern behests and sacred commandments, with which a ruler is under an obligation to comply by his coronation oath.'

The Maharaja took legitimate pride in the fact that, so far as his own State was concerned, he had from the very beginning of his reign kept these seven points always before him and had given effect to them. On his own initiative, as long ago as April 1902, the privy purse had been separated from the State revenues. In 1910 the Chief Court was established and the independence of the judiciary formally recognized. By the establishment of the Representative Assembly in 1913, the Maharaja had given to the State the certainty of law and the assurance that all measures of legislation would only be in the interests of the people. To the security of life and property and the stability of services, the Maharaja had devoted continuous attention. It was therefore in no vainglorious spirit that he claimed, in the presence of the elected representatives of his people, that he had always practised what he was now preaching.

It was indeed time for this question to be frankly discussed. Following the non-co-operation movement of 1921-3, there had come into being an organization known as the States' Subjects Conference. This body pretended to represent the subjects of the different States of India, and was controlled by a group of men who for some reason or other had grievances against their States. Others also there were, ready to fish in troubled waters anywhere, editors of small and unknown papers, would-be Bottomleys who thought the States were legitimate prey for their activities, disappointed place-hunters in States who saw in the activities of the Conference an opportunity of forcing themselves on the notice of the rulers. Owing to the adventitious association of this body with the National Congress, the nationalist press in India attached to its work considerable importance. Besides, they were able, at least in the earlier days, when their real purpose was carefully disguised under a cloak of popular phrases, to secure the support

of some distinguished public men of British India like Dewan Bahadur (later Sir) Ramchandra Rao, Mr. C. Y. Chintamani, and Mr. Kelkar.

The main line of attack which the Conference had developed was to proclaim that there was no security of person or property in the States, that their administrations were merely cloaks for the personal autocracy of the rulers, and that the subjects of the States were living in a perpetual state of terror and oppression. All the States were tarred with the same brush. Their attacks on individual rulers received great publicity in a section of the Indian press, and their general claims had at least the nominal support of the nationalist leaders. When the Butler Committee was appointed, the spokesmen of the States' Peoples Conference claimed to be heard in evidence, but Sir Harcourt Butler held that, as they were appointed to inquire into the relations arising out of treaties, agreements, and sanads, there was no occasion to hear the point of view of the subjects of the States. The leaders of the Conference thereupon took up the position that the claim of the Princes, which had led to the inquiry, was meant to

- (1) perpetuate autocracy, absolutism and misrule;
- (2) stem the rising tide of nationalism in British India, and the increasing power of public opinion in their own States;
- (3) secure a blank cheque to oppress their subjects and to squander public money, and
- (4) work generally against their subjects and the best interests of their subjects, 'altogether ignoring' them';

whilst another so-called 'authority' and 'prominent leader' was good enough to attribute 'the political and economic ruin' of the States to the 'personal rule of the Princes'.

The Maharaja, who, owing to his prominence, was one of the obvious targets for the attacks of this self-constituted body, was ready to take up the challenge.

Addressing the Bikaner Administrative Conference in 1929, he dealt at length with the propaganda and the activities of these so-called leaders of Indian States' subjects and the effect their proposals would have on the States and their people.

While the Maharaja was convinced that the activities of the Conference were *mala fide* and mischievous, he was not blind to the necessity of internal reform. He knew that the rise of Indian nationalism made any absolute division between British India and the States impossible, and his advice to the princes to take in hand without delay the internal reforms of their States was a clarion call to resist the forces of disruption rather than to yield to the clamour of discontented agitators.

The Maharaja did not directly participate in the work of the Butler Committee. He deputed his Prime Minister, Sir Manubhai Mehta, to represent him in this work in London. But he kept both the Committee and his brother Princes in London fully informed of his views. To Sir Harcourt Butler, before the Committee sat in formal session, the Maharaja sent a message stating that he and his brother princes devoutly prayed

'not only in the interests of ourselves, our States, and our subjects, but also in the interests of the Empire that your work and recommendations will result directly in securing justice and equitable settlement of all points involved and in early realization of the great hopes raised by the appointment of your Committee and in removing the serious disabilities which hamper us continuously in promoting the happiness and the well-being of our subjects, developing our States to the fullest extent possible and rendering the maximum of service to our beloved King-Emperor and his Empire'.

The Butler Committee published its Report in April 1929. It is not too much to say that its findings came as an unpleasant surprise to the States. Apart from the acceptance of the principle which Sir Leslie Scott had

enunciated, that the treaty relationship of the States, being with the Crown, cannot be transferred without the consent of the States to any British Indian authority over which the Crown has not full control, their report was mainly a justification of the past and present practice of the Government of India. To the demand of the Princes that paramountcy should be defined, the Committee replied that paramountcy must remain paramount. The princes were not only disappointed but greatly agitated, especially as they knew that the parliamentary commission, which had in the meantime come to India and conducted the statutory inquiry regarding the success of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, was going to recommend a further political advance for British India. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, was soon to proceed to England on leave, to urge on the Government in England the necessity of dealing with the Indian problem on broader lines. It was necessary that the princes should act without delay if, in the discussions that the Viceroy was going personally to initiate in London, their claim was not to be overlooked. A representative meeting of princes was convened in Bombay on the eve of Lord Irwin's departure for England, and the Maharaja was invited by the Chancellor, who was unable to be present, to preside over its deliberations. The Bombay meeting of June 1929 was historic. It formulated the views of the princes and States on the recommendations of the Butler Committee in a manner which left the Government of India in no doubt as to the intentions of the princes.

Lord Irwin returned to India at the end of October, and made a notable pronouncement on the 31st of that month expressing the desire of His Majesty's Government to summon in London a Round Table Conference of all interests, to reach by discussion and agreement a solution of the Indian problem. The ostensible reason for holding such a conference was Sir John Simon's own

suggestion to the Prime Minister that the proposals regarding the final form of the government of India could only be tentative so long as they were confined to British India and did not take into consideration the problem of associating the States in the central Government. Any such proposals could only be put into effect with the consent of the Indian States. The Viceroy was able to persuade His Majesty's Government to take a wider view of the situation, and the proposal as it emerged after consultations between the Cabinet and himself was for a conference, representative of all interests, to deal with the Indian problem as a whole. The Maharaja was one of the first to realize the significance of this proposal, and in a press interview on the 2nd of November he welcomed it warmly.

'Far from feeling any apprehensions the Princes and Governments of the Indian States will, I feel sure, welcome the proposed Round Table Conference, as it will on the contrary, it is hoped, finally set at rest all the doubts and apprehensions entertained in the States and clarify the special position of the States within the Empire. The princes, realizing full well that they are bound to their brethren in British India by ties of blood, race and religion, have no desire to hamper the attainment of Dominion status by British India or to be a drag on its constitutional advancement. Nothing is farther from their desire than to break up the country into two discordant halves warring against each other in fratricidal feuds; and they look forward to the unity of India as earnestly as their friends, the political leaders of British India. Any attitude of undue incompatibility on the part of the princes would be both unpatriotic and unreasonable. They have in the past repeatedly emphasized their sympathy with the legitimate aspirations of their fellow countrymen in British India, and they went a step farther at the Bombay Conference in June last when they cordially welcomed the goal of Dominion status by British India as an integral part of the British Empire. In my speech at the Administrative Conference delivered only a month ago, after

expressing the hope that the rumours were true about the Round Table Conference to be convened by the Imperial Government, I went on to state that the sympathy and support of the princes would be forthcoming in a very substantial and practical manner at such a Conference. Though various important details have yet to be considered and agreed upon, the princes are not unmindful of the full implications of Dominion status now happily assured to India. They have openly given expression to the belief that the ultimate solution of the Indian problem and the ultimate goal—whenever circumstances are favourable and the time is ripe for it—is Federation, a word which has no terrors for the princes and governments of the States. Ever since 1918, the princes have been asking for some means of joint deliberation on questions of common concern affecting British India as well as the States. Customs duties; excise, salt and opium; railways and means of transport and intercommunication, including aerial navigation; posts and telegraphs; wireless and radio broadcasting; as well as the fiscal and financial problems of coinage and currency, banking and exchange—these are all questions affecting and demanding joint deliberation between the constituted Governments of the two constituent parts of the country. The policy hitherto pursued in the absence of joint deliberation has not only been unjust to the interests of the States but has benefited the Government and people of British India at the expense of the States.

‘I fully appreciate the importance of evolving, with the free consent of all the parties concerned, a suitable constitution for India which would guarantee for the future and protect their several rights and interests; but in my view such a conference, if it is to be of any value, must be tripartite; and it is on these grounds that the princes will, I am sure, welcome the conference proposed by the Imperial Government. The princes and States have made it abundantly clear that they stand solid for the British connexion, and they cannot attend a conference held in the absence of the other party to our treaties.

In conclusion, I beg respectfully to share in the Viceroy’s hope that the Pronouncement may evoke response from and enlist the concurrence of all sections of opinion in India. I earnestly pray that His Excellency’s hope will be fulfilled by

the determined efforts of the leaders and people throughout India, wherever and whoever they are, breaking through the webs of mistrust, which have clogged the relations not only between India and Great Britain, but between British India and the States. It will be the duty of every one to contribute to the success of the conference by constructive and not destructive proposals. Whatever mistakes have been made on any side, or by any individuals, in the past, now, with the prospects once again bright for India, we ought, each and every one of us, to remember the eloquent and moving appeal made by His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught in 1921, "to bury along with the dead past the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past, to forgive where you have to forgive, and to join hands and to work together to realize the hopes that arise from to-day", and thus bring about, in His Excellency the Viceroy's words, "the touch that carries with it healing and health", by which we may all contribute to the good of Greater India and of the Empire.'

The Conference was proposed to be summoned in November 1930. It was clear that if the claims of the princes were to obtain recognition, and if the settlement resulting from the Conference was to be satisfactory to them, considerable preliminary preparation would have to be undertaken. The Chamber session of February 1930 was, therefore, all-important. The conclusions and the dicta of the Butler Committee had to be contested; for to go to the Conference without challenging those views would have been to give away the case of the States. A programme and policy for the Indian States delegation had to be decided upon. The Chamber which met on the 25th of February was attended by a large number of princes, and the Maharaja led the attack on the Butler Report. The main question which caused apprehension among the princes was the vague and general terms in which the Committee had dealt with the right of the paramount Power to intervene in the States. It was not denied by the princes that in view of the protection



afforded to the States from external aggression and internal rebellion, the paramount Power had the right of intervention in certain well-defined cases. But their complaint was that legitimate intervention in the interests of the States more often than otherwise degenerated into petty interference, intended to exhibit the power and increase the prestige of the political officers: that there was no knowing on what subject the representative of the British Government might interfere and in what respect the ruler's discretion was left unfettered. Sir George Campbell had remarked over half a century ago that there was no matter, big or small, in which the political officer did not consider it his right to meddle.

The Maharaja's own experiences in the early period of his reign had been unfortunate in this respect. The Political Agent had gone to the extent of trying to interfere not only in matters of administrative reform but even in the case of a dismissed menial, and on the complaint of a petty officer of police. So late as 1925, in the case of Raja Jeoraj Singhji, Sir Robert Holland had tried to interfere with the considered decision of the Maharaja, and it was only the firmness which long experience had taught His Highness that prevented a revision of the orders passed on that case.

The crucial point in the case of the States was the limitation of the right of intervention. By whatever name it might be called—'definition of paramountcy', 'enforcing of treaty rights', 'codification of political practice'—to the princes it meant the same thing. And it is on this question that the Butler Committee had not only been vague and indefinite but through such statements as 'paramountcy must remain paramount' enlarged the scope of such intervention. The informal conference of princes preceding the Chamber which discussed this question chose the Maharaja to move the resolution which they drafted in this behalf. The speech that the

Maharaja delivered in the Chamber was a clear and comprehensive statement of the case of the princes and put the point of view for the limitation of this right of intervention in the most effective manner.

The Maharaja also proceeded to analyse a number of cases, either within his knowledge or within his experience.

He added:

'I am sure, and I am confident so are my brother princes, that nothing is farther from the policy or intention of Your Excellency personally and the present Political Secretary than that intervention should in any case be arbitrary; and we are grateful to Your Excellency for your assurance that the unpalatable task involved in intervention or interference is resorted to only with the greatest reluctance. One of the most important things that is urgently called for is that the Prince and his Government concerned should have the fullest opportunities of making their representation on the subject; and if, as we hope, such consultations as are contemplated under this resolution lead to some further details being satisfactorily worked out in this connexion also, it will be one of the additional advantages of our jointly examining the question.

'As I said yesterday, policies and political practice are often liable to change with a change of the viceroy or the political secretary, and in some cases even with a change of the political officers accredited to our Courts. And unfortunately sad cases have occurred in the past involving not only humiliation to the ruler concerned, but often—however benevolent the intention—grave injustice and irretrievable harm to the dignity and prestige and, indeed, the entire career of the ruler. These cases sometimes place the British Government in a most embarrassing and unenviable position, especially when they recognize later on that their action was hasty and arbitrary, at times based on one-sided reports and versions; but matters are often then found to have gone too far to permit of a satisfactory and honourable settlement. On considerations of prestige and other grounds, it is too late to rectify the wrong done.

‘It will be easily realized that intervention, and the result of the action taken after intervention leading to the deposition or abdication of the ruler concerned, means at times the extinction of the public career of a ruler and amounts to his political death. As a parallel I might cite the instance of a man wrongly hanged for murder, and if it is afterwards discovered that the man was innocent, it is too late to bring the unfortunate person back to life. . . .

‘In the passage on which the Butler Committee rely, the circumstances in which intervention would be warranted have been detailed—a very different thing from leaving the right of intervention wholly dependent upon the individual discretion of the political officer. The Committee, moreover, have really propounded a new doctrine; they have suggested an extension of the scope of intervention beyond what the Government of India themselves have claimed so far. They contend that the right to intervene may be exercised in the interests of India as a whole, and even in order to suggest changes in the traditional forms of administration in case of popular agitation. These are really new principles and new claims. They are dangerous principles, for they make intervention dependent upon circumstances over which a prince may have no control. To take one case—extreme, but not inconceivable—would intervention be justified by popular agitation in India in favour of the substitution of the form of government in which the prince was to be excluded from all effective participation in the government of his State, supported by agitation within the State, instigated from British India? Surely our traditional institutions and usages cannot be exposed to changes demanded by uninformed caprice and clamour—often by persons noisy in the extreme, but really either in the minority, or not really representative of the various classes and communities of the bona fide subjects of the States. The risk is not fanciful, for no one can prophesy how far popular agitation in India against Indian States—much of it based on misconception or even malicious misrepresentation—may go, and what changes in our policy it may demand. A popularized central Government in British India, even though it may have no concern with the princes, could, and is bound to, influence indirectly perhaps but

substantially, the discretion of future viceroys. Even if intervention has a less drastic purpose, e.g. to ensure co-operation in a matter of interest both to British India and the States, would not a popularized central Government have a position of substantial advantage over the States in influencing the decision of the Viceroy?

'British India is more vocal than ourselves. The Provinces have been vociferously clamouring for greater provincial autonomy, more freedom from interference by the central Government and less restrictions upon their own authority. They ask for a gift of new rights. The States ask for a restoration of their original status, of what actually belonged to them. If the British Indian Legislatures and Provincial Governments are to be invested with greater autonomy, so as to minimize intervention in their administration from the powers that be, the States have a greater justification in claiming a restoration of their own original internal autonomy, so as sufficiently to safeguard it from encroachments in the near, or distant, future. Such a happy consummation will bring in its train obvious and substantial political and other advantages of the highest mutual importance. Moreover—what, comparatively speaking, is of no small consideration—it will conduce to the peace of mind of all concerned and to the increased efficiency of our respective work in the task of administration, untrammelled by unnecessary interruption and worries and anxieties, so far as the relations of the Crown and the States are concerned.'

Another important point on which the Maharaja led the discussion was the doctrine of usage and sufferance which is often appealed to by the Government of India against the States. The princes claim that usage is valid only under certain definite conditions; that it must have developed in the State concerned; that it must have a certain extension in space and in time; that usages which developed during minorities, &c., should not be considered as binding. The practice followed by the Government of India, as Lord Chelmsford himself admitted in the Princes' Conferences, often was to apply the

precedents which developed in and were appropriate to the lesser States to the major States also; and Sir Robert Holland, when acting as Political Secretary, did not fail to recognize 'that a body of usage influencing the relations with the States had come into force through a process which, though benevolent in intention, was to some extent arbitrary'. But the Butler Committee were *plus royalistes que le roi*. They declared that 'usage lighted up the dark corners of treaties' and indicated that any attempt to define or limit its operation was as unnecessary as it was undesirable. The princes naturally could not accept such a position, and the Maharaja, in moving a resolution on that question, demolished these pretensions with relentless logic, appealing for a rectification of the procedure and a liberalization of policy in a manner consistent with the position of the States and their special relations with the Crown.

Nor did the Maharaja forget to emphasize the necessity for internal reforms, and he called the attention of his brother princes to the fact that much depended on themselves in securing and consolidating the position of the States. He added:

'Your Highnesses do not need to be told by me that in such cases where even the essentials of good government are not manifest, no other course of action will stem the tide of public opinion in these States, which in such circumstances must ultimately sweep everything before it. Nor do Your Highnesses need to be reminded by me that the strength and the safety of a ruler and his State do not for all time lie in the bayonets of the British Government or of his own Army, but can only be permanently secured and maintained if his rule is broad-based on the loyalty and affection and the contentment and co-operation of his own people. Hence the imperative and urgent necessity, where required, of putting our houses in order. Many instances are forthcoming of the disastrous results—disastrous not only to the sovereign personally, but in my humble opinion disastrous in many ways to the State, as well as

to society—to the mightiest sovereigns of some of the greatest powers and empires on the face of this earth, who failing to detect the signs of the times rushed headlong to their doom, or brought it on their descendants, through unwise autocracy.

Human nature being what it is and with different conditions prevailing in different States, it is impossible to expect all the rulers of our States to be of one uniform quality; and occasional lapses are, alas! inevitable. But such painful revelations, Your Highnesses will agree, do no good to the Order as a whole or to the States as a body. Similarly the crippling beyond measure of the State finances, and the attendant neglect to find sufficient funds to ensure good government for the State and for the purpose of advancing the happiness, prosperity and contentment of its subjects, has an adverse effect on us all in matters fiscal and financial as well as political. And in this connexion I am tempted once more to quote from His Excellency's recent speech at Rajkot:

“... the more your administrations approximate to the standards of efficiency demanded by enlightened public opinion elsewhere, the easier will it be to find a just and permanent solution”

of the difficulties and disabilities from which the States have been suffering.’

Never had such frank speeches been heard in the Chamber. Both the Government of India and the British Indian public were surprised at the strength of the princes' opposition to the claims advocated by the Butler Committee and the new tone which pervaded the speeches in the Chamber. The disappointment caused by the Butler Report was already having its effect, and the vague feeling was in the air that, apart from protests, something positive was necessary if the position of the princes was to be safeguarded.

Lord Irwin had in the meantime agreed to a discussion with the Standing Committee on the general questions arising out of the Butler Report and on the procedure to

be followed at the Round Table Conference. The Standing Committee of Princes and the ministers of Hyderabad, Mysore, and Baroda had been invited to meet the Viceroy in Simla; and there, on the 14th of July 1930, after a detailed discussion on the points arising from the Butler Report, the Viceroy announced that the Standing Committee and the ministers invited would be selected by the Government of India as delegates on behalf of the princes to the Round Table Conference.

For some time past the Government of India had under consideration the question of entrusting the leadership of the Indian delegation to the League of Nations to Indians instead of ex-viceroy and other officials as had been the custom before. In 1930 the principle was decided upon and the choice fell upon the Maharaja. He was also nominated as one of India's representatives at the Imperial Conference which was summoned to meet in October 1930 in London. His Highness therefore left India, accompanied by his younger son Prince Bijay Singhji and his secretary Mr. G. S. (now Sir Girja) Bajpai, by s.s. *Narkunda*, on the 14th of August. His colleagues in the League delegation this time were Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan and Sir Robert Greaves, whose place later on was taken by Sir Basant Mallik. As leader of the Indian delegation, it fell to the Maharaja to co-ordinate the work of the other members and to nominate them to the different Committees of the League Assembly. The Maharaja himself served on the two most important committees: Committee No. 3, which dealt with disarmament, and Committee No. 4, which dealt with the reorganization of the League secretariat.

The most important preoccupation of the League in that year was the scheme of European union which had been foreshadowed by M. Briand in 1929, and which he elaborated in detail in the general debate in 1930. M. Briand, like every French statesman after the War, was gravely

concerned with the problem of European security, and the new scheme that he adumbrated was a union of European States which would guarantee the frontiers established by Versailles and enable France to enjoy the fruits of her victory without the nightmare of another war. In the idealistic though unreal atmosphere of Geneva this proposal was received with enthusiasm by the smaller States and with a polite scepticism by the greater Powers.

The danger in this proposal lay in the reactions it was bound to have in non-European States. The organization of Europe would justify the criticism to which from the beginning the League had been subjected, that it was a syndicate of Imperialist powers, who had gathered together to safeguard their hegemony over the rest of the world, and the Maharaja did not hesitate to draw attention to this aspect of M. Briand's proposals. After emphasizing how India had always been inspired by the will to peace, he declared:

'Nevertheless, may a word of warning come without offence, and yet not without force, from the East? M. Briand disarmed criticism, it is true, by disclaiming all idea of organizing Europe in a spirit of antagonism to the outside world. Indeed, he described his plan as one of those regional agreements which, so far from impairing, are designed to fulfil the purpose of the Covenant. But is there not a danger in these early years of the League that a plan for the closer union of Europe may give rise to misapprehensions outside Europe itself as running counter to the basic conception of the Covenant that the League exists, not for Europe, not for Asia, but for the world? Any impression that Europe, better organized industrially, thanks to its mastery of the applied sciences, than most of the old, and some of the young, non-European countries, is seeking to consolidate its industrial position to the detriment—however unintended—of less fortunate parts of the world might conceivably lead to consequences which no member of the League could desire. It was indeed a happy instinct that prompted M. Briand to refer the whole question to the League, so that not



merely Europe but all members of the League might be given an opportunity for considering how far the League machinery could fitly be adapted to the treatment of such regional problems. . . .

'Let no one, Mr. President, misunderstand the tenor of my remarks. Smooth words come easily enough to the lips. But without sympathetic criticism—where criticism is needed—there can be no progress. One and all, we are loyal to the League; of that our presence here to-day is evidence. But it would be a poor sort of loyalty that fought shy of fearless introspection. It is not enough for us to serve the League blindly. We must serve it with that loyalty that comes of clear-sighted courage.'

This timely and frank utterance made a great impression on the Assembly, which was suddenly roused from the magic spell which had been cast over it by the fervent eloquence of M. Briand and called to face the realities which, in the charm of his sonorous phrases, it was inclined to forget. The resolution that was finally adopted by the Assembly on the subject reflected the caution which was expressed by the Maharaja.

From Geneva the Maharaja proceeded to London, to take part in the Imperial Conference to which also he had been nominated. It was opened on the 1st of October. He was the doyen of the Conference, having taken part in the Conferences of 1917 and 1918. Except for Mr. Arthur Henderson none of the great statesmen who had been associated with him in those Conferences, Prime Ministers and representatives of the great Dominions, Mr. Lloyd George, General Smuts, Sir Robert Borden, Mr. William Hughes, apart from others like Lord Curzon, Mr. A. J. Balfour, and Sir Austen Chamberlain were around the table now. But it was interesting to note that the Maharaja's colleague in the Indian delegation was Sir Mahommed Shafi, who as a non-official member was responsible for the resolution in the old Imperial Council

which secured for India the membership of the Conference. The Maharaja was among the first three delegates to take part in the Imperial Conference in conformity with that resolution; and in 1930, thirteen years after that eventful day, the sponsor of the resolution and the first representative under it appeared together to speak in the councils of the Empire.

The range of the Conference was wide. The Conference immediately preceding, that of 1926, had been historic in inter-Imperial relations in that it defined the attributes of 'Dominion status' by agreeing to what came to be known as 'the Statute of Westminster'. The implications of this agreement had to be further studied and stated in the form of constitutional propositions by experts and then by another Imperial Conference. The preparatory work in this connexion had been done by the Conference on Dominion Legislation that met in London in the autumn of 1926. Its report was the basis of the agenda of the Conference and dealt with a number of highly important, but intricate, constitutional problems, such as the legislative powers of the Dominion parliaments, the provision of machinery for the adjustment of disputes between self-governing members of the Commonwealth, the diplomatic representation abroad of the Dominions, &c. This group of subjects formed one important part of the agenda; the other related to closer economic co-operation between the various units of the Empire with a view to the promotion of economic prosperity. Between them they occupied most of the time of the Conference.

The Maharaja was nominated a member of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee and followed its proceedings with keen interest, for he realized that they would be of great importance in the future for India. Especially was he interested in the scheme for the setting up of a Commonwealth tribunal for the purpose of determining

differences and adjusting disputes of a justiciable character, which might arise between the Dominions *inter se*, or between one of them and Great Britain, because he felt that it might not be without bearing upon similar problems that had been engaging the attention of the princes and the Government of India for a long time.

Another problem dealt with by the Conference in which the Maharaja felt great interest was the discussion on nationality and common status of the subjects of the different Dominions. Though the subjects of Indian rulers, not being British subjects, were not touched by this discussion, the Maharaja, with that caution which is characteristic of him, felt it necessary to place on record that his presence at the Imperial Conference or the absence of any remarks on his part should not be taken to imply admission of any alteration in the status and nationality of Indian States and their rulers and their subjects by the discussion of this or other allied inter-Imperial subjects at the Conference.

As the doyen of the Conference and one with wide experience of inter-Imperial problems, the Maharaja received much consideration from the assembled Dominion and British statesmen. He was selected to reply on behalf of India to Mr. MacDonald's speech of welcome on the opening day of the Conference, and in all the social and other functions he was shown marked courtesy by all. The Prime Minister, writing to him on the eve of his departure to India, paid a handsome tribute and added :

'The Imperial Conference indeed has owed much to you before, seeing that, as long as 13 years ago, you took part in its deliberations; in fact, this year, as one of India's representatives again, you were the doyen amongst the representatives present from every quarter of the Empire.'

Hard upon the Imperial Conference followed the Indian Round Table Conference. To appreciate the

Maharaja's work in this great and momentous conference, which shaped the political destiny of India, it is necessary to keep in mind two most important factors. The original proposal relating to the Round Table Conference, so far as the States were concerned, was of a strictly limited character. It was merely to discuss and find methods of closer co-operation between the two parts of Greater India. For this purpose it had been suggested that the States' representatives should sit in joint session with British Indian representatives on certain occasions. The purpose of the Conference as originally conceived was to find ways and means of greater political power for British India—to give to it the substance of political freedom. The Indian States were merely a secondary party whose objections had to be overcome by persuasion at joint conferences. Secondly, the idea of a federation was not even conceived either by the Government of India or the British Government or by a large body of princes. The Maharaja had as early as 1914 put forward the conception of a federated India as a solution of the problem of the two Indias. But, so far as the main body of princes' representatives were concerned, the federal idea was as strange to them as any other scheme of union with British India. Further, there was a very strong feeling in all British Indian circles, which had been strengthened by the theory that Sir Leslie Scott had put forward and to which years of propaganda had lent colour, that the States would stand solidly against the claims of British India and would support the Government in denying self-government and Dominion status to India. In fact the British Indian representatives had come to the Conference strongly suspicious of the Indian States. The position was not without danger. If the States permitted themselves to be made a 'barrier' against India's just claims, they would not only earn the hostility of British India but be held up as the enemies of

India and traitors to her cause. If, on the other hand, they supported British Indian claims, their own special position which depended on the protection of the Crown might easily be jeopardized. To steer a course which, while strengthening the States and safeguarding their legitimate rights, would also give support to British Indian claims was no easy task. And yet this was the duty which fell to the Maharaja, whose earlier presence in London for the work of the Imperial Conference was of crucial importance in deciding the attitude of the States before the Round Table Conference met in open session.

In this work the Maharaja had the assistance of Sir Kailas Haksar, who as the Director of the Princes' Special Organization was in direct charge of the preparation of the work of the Conference, and of his own Prime Minister, Sir Manubhai Mehta. With the help of these two distinguished statesmen, the Maharaja set himself the task of drawing up a programme which, while maintaining the States in their rights for the present, would also safeguard them in the future. The discussions in this connexion were carried on at the Carlton Hotel, where the Maharaja was staying, and which became the rendezvous of Indian leaders. Out of these discussions originated the detailed scheme of federation.

After the ceremonial opening in the House of Lords, the Conference met at St. James's Palace under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister on the 12th of November. The gathering was in every way unique. The big drawing-room of that ancient palace could never have witnessed a conference of equal variety and magnificence. At one end of the table sat the Princes of India with that veteran Ruler, the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda, at their head. On his left were the bearers of the great names of Indian princely chivalry, the Maharajas of Kashmir, Bikaner, Patiala, Rewa, Dholpur, and Alwar, and the Nawab of Bhopal, along with ministers who had already achieved

distinction in the difficult fields of statesmanship—Sir Akbar Hydari, Sir Kailas Haksar, Sir Manubhai Mehta, and Sir Mirza Ismail. Nor was the British Indian representation less striking. Opposite the Prime Minister, who presided, sat the Aga Khan, the spiritual head of the Ismailia community and the leader of the Muslim delegates to the Conference. On his left sat the Muslim representatives, the best known among whom were Mr. Mahommed Ali Jinnah and Sir Mahommed Shafi. At the corner supporting the Muslims sat the two women delegates, Mrs. Subbarayan and Begam Shah Nawaz. Among the Hindu delegates two figures stood out, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. The British delegation was no less impressive. Besides the Prime Minister and Lord Sankey, that delegation contained two men: one whose name was familiar to every one in India as that of a brilliant ex-Viceroy on whose attitude much depended—Lord Reading; the other a comparatively unknown figure, but destined to write his name indelibly in the record of the Conference and who came to loom larger and larger as time went on—Sir Samuel Hoare.

The proceedings opened with due solemnity. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, who opened the case for India, did so in a speech that will go down to history as a masterpiece of political exposition. It was clear, it was convincing, and, what was more, it was presented in such a way that the conclusion—a Federal Government with responsibility at the centre—seemed inevitable. In solemn tones he invited the great princes of India to join hands with their brethren in British India to establish an All-India Federation which would re-unite the common motherland into a great nation. When he finished speaking the atmosphere was indeed electric. The whole Conference was for a moment lulled into awed and expectant silence before applause burst forth from all quarters. Hardly had the echoes of the reverberating cheers died down,

when the Maharaja rose from his seat to express the views of the Princes of India. The future of the motherland depended upon the attitude Their Highnesses would take on this occasion. It was for them to say whether they would help in the creation of an All-India Federation, or stand rigidly by the letter of their treaties. The Maharaja did not allow the Conference to remain long in doubt. He welcomed the idea of federation, with legitimate safeguards for the interests of the States, and affirmed the faith that was in him that in the greatness of India lay the greatness of her Princes.

The Maharaja said :

‘It is, I submit, our duty to bend our energies to the task of satisfying this righteous demand without impairing the majestic fabric of the law. How can this best be achieved? My own conviction is that if we are to build well and truly, we must recognize that associated with this geographical unity India is a land of some diversity. Our starting-point, therefore, must be a recognition of this diversity; our unity must be sought not in the dead hand of an impossible uniformity but in an associated diversity. For these reasons, the establishment of a unitary State, with a sovereign parliament sitting at Delhi, to which the whole people would look in small things as in large, is to my mind impossible. There would be no room in such a constitution for the Indian States; moreover, such a government would crack under its own imponderability. Would it not mean the harnessing of the most advanced to the chariot-wheels of the least developed, and the slowing down of the general tide of progress? We of the Indian States are willing to take our part in, and make our contribution to, the greater prosperity and contentment of India as a whole. I am convinced that we can best make that contribution through a federal system of government composed of the States and British India. These two partners are of different status. The Indian States are already sovereign and autonomous of right, having the honour of being linked with the Crown by means of treaties of “perpetual alliance and friendship” and unity of

interests; British India deserves whatever measure of authority it may possess by devolution. But it will not be beyond the wealth of experience available at this Table to devise a means of linking these differing units into a powerful federal administration.

*'As to the question whether, if a federal government is devised for India, the Princes and States will enter into association with it, the final answer must obviously depend on the structure of the government indicated and on other points involved, such, for instance, as certain necessary safeguards—constitutional and fiscal—for the preservation of the rights and interests of the States and their subjects. Federalism is an elastic term: there are several forms of federal government. Conditions in India are unique. We have no historical precedents to guide us; and the position of the Indian States is, I believe I am correct in saying, absolutely without parallel. All these and many other grave questions of policy and of detail will have to be examined and defined and settled first in Committee and in informal discussions. But, speaking broadly, the princes and States realize that an All-India Federation is likely to prove the only satisfactory solution of India's problem. A Federation, on the lines I have attempted to sketch on other occasions, has, as I have previously said, no terrors for the Princes and Governments of the Indian States. We, however, recognize that a period of transition will necessarily intervene before the Federal Government is fully constituted, and that federation cannot be achieved by coercion of the States in any form. The Indian princes will only come into the Federation of their own free will and on terms which will secure the just rights of their States and subjects.'*

'I would not venture on the impertinence of even suggesting what course is best for British India. As we demand freedom from interference in our own affairs, equally we shall refrain from thrusting our oars into matters which are not our direct concern; the arrangements between the Central and Provincial Governments in British India are matters primarily outside the purview of the Indian States. If our co-operation is sought, it will, I am sure, be gladly, freely and honestly given. Our duty is to contribute, so far as we can, to the evolution of a system of government which will lead to the close and effective association of the Indian States with British India, whose



constitution is to be hammered out here. At the same time the rights in certain directions of the rulers of the Indian States arising from their treaties require to be more precisely defined. The princes and States naturally want to know where they stand. However sincerely desirous of making their contribution to a happy settlement, they will obviously find it difficult to enter into new bonds so long as their rights are left tottering on the shifting sands of expediency deemed paramount at the moment. I think I can best elucidate what is referred to by quoting from a speech I made in the Chamber of Princes on behalf of my Order, on the 27th February last:

“Newfangled theories about the ultimate powers regarding paramountcy, and such matters, before the appointment of the Butler Committee, and the extravagant and exaggerated imperialist claims, inconsistent with the plighted word and good faith of Great Britain, or sound statesmanship, advanced on behalf of the paramount power—claims more wide, more frequent, more insistent and, I respectfully submit, based on varied and not infrequently untenable grounds and opposed to constitutional and historical facts and to the provisions of our treaties and other engagements, and in direct contradiction of the solemn and clear pledges and assurances in the famous gracious Proclamation of Queen Victoria, repeatedly reiterated and affirmed by successive British sovereigns in numerous proclamations—have not helped to ease the situation or to allay the anxieties of the States or their Rulers, Governments or people.”

“The princes and States fortified by the legal opinion obtained from some of the most eminent counsel in Great Britain have found themselves unable particularly to accept such claims on the principles enunciated in this connexion by the Indian States Committee, and have already taken up the matter with the Viceroy and the British Government. Starting with the basic recognition that our treaty rights exist and must be respected; that they are with the Crown and cannot be transferred to any other authority without our agreement; and that they can be modified only with our free assent; three developments of the existing administrative machinery are essential for the smooth working of the new system, and indeed of any system. It is a

matter of open complaint that our treaty rights have been infringed. I need not stress this point, for it has been publicly admitted by no less an authority than the Viceroy and Governor-General of India that the treaty rights of the States have been encroached upon, and that in some cases an arbitrary body of usage and political practice has come into being. The time has passed when issues of this importance can be decided *ex parte* by any Government. We therefore attach the utmost importance to the establishment of a Supreme Court, with full powers to entertain and adjudicate upon all disputes of a justiciable nature as to our rights and obligations guaranteed under our treaties. This is another point which I need not labour, for it is a principle to which the leaders of political thought in British India have, I believe I am right in saying, lent their full support. Next, we claim that in the questions which arise concerning the purely internal affairs of the States their case should not go by default. That will be of still greater importance in the future. The King's vicegerent in India is even now burdened with many and grievous responsibilities, which will be weighted under the new system of government; and here I would once again like to be associated in a respectful tribute to, and to express our deep admiration and gratitude for that great Viceroy, Lord Irwin. We think that it will be impossible for any man, however able, amid these grave pre-occupations, to give adequate personal attention to those questions affecting the States which come up for day-to-day decision, and for which he will be directly responsible to the Crown. For these reasons some of us press for the appointment of an Indian States Council, to work with the political secretary and to advise the Viceroy of the day. Thirdly, there will be need for the classification of those administrative questions which are of common concern to British India and the Indian States. This classification will require the previous consent of the States. As we advance further on the road to Federation there are other issues which will need safeguarding; as they are in the nature of details they are not our main concern to-day.

‘With this contribution to the common task before us, I have done. Before I sit down, may I ask forgiveness if, as an old soldier, I have unwittingly given offence to any one by any

bluntness of speech? I am inspired by one thought—service to my beloved King-Emperor and devotion to my Motherland. Akbar, the greatest of Moguls, when he set out on the crowning adventure of his crowded life placed his feet in the stirrups of opportunity and his hands on the reins of confidence in God. I would commend to you on the threshold of our great enterprise—the conquest of anarchy and reaction in Hindustan and the assurance of our contentment and prosperity as a coequal partner in our great Commonwealth—the words of Abraham Lincoln in circumstances not altogether remote from these:

“With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work that we are in.”

Indeed a most momentous declaration. The world had not been taught to expect it. Many even among the British Indian delegates did not know what attitude the princes were going to take. It was seen in a flash that by this declaration the whole situation had been changed—‘revolutionized’, as the Prime Minister said. India was pleased; the reactionaries in England who had pinned their faith to the princes were startled and amazed. In three continents the question was asked: ‘What made the princes of India take such a bold step?’

Various motives were assigned. In the extreme British Indian camp it was whispered that the princes were being used by His Majesty’s Government to water down the grant of self-government. The British public was informed by disgruntled ex-Governors that the princes’ declaration was the result of an unholy alliance between the Brahmin ministers of States and the Brahmin seditionists of British India. The Government of India declared that, while they were pleased at the development, it came as a total surprise to them and that the secretariat had no proposals ready to meet such a situation. Undoubtedly, by the Maharaja’s declaration the princes had brought about a sudden and unexpected change.

What were the real motives which made the Maharaja and his colleagues take such an epoch-making decision? The truth is indeed simple. The more forward-looking among the princes—the Maharaja among them, as witness his note to Lord Hardinge—had always visualized a united self-governing India, in which their own rights and prerogatives were secured and guaranteed. This was no new conception to them. The experience of ten years in the Chamber of Princes had shown them that, without an effective machinery for the administration of common subjects, their own position would become increasingly difficult in a self-governing India. More than all these considerations was the effect of the new and integral nationalism of the Indian people. The Indian patriotism of the rulers had been fired by the sincerity and strength of the nationalist movement, and certainly the Maharaja, who from 1916 at least had been a staunch advocate of freedom for India under the British Crown, was deeply moved by what he had seen of the mass movement in Bombay in 1930. It might also be that the disappointment caused by the reactionary conclusions of the Butler Report had its share in shaping the decision of the Princes.

Whatever the reasons, the Maharaja's speech was truly epoch-making. It transformed the character of the Conference and undoubtedly changed the course of Indian political evolution. Responsible government at the centre, to which the objection put forward by the British Government had always been that their responsibilities to the States and their relations with the princes rendered such a devolution of authority impossible, became a question of immediate practical politics. The excuse that the princes stood in the way of British India's advance became meaningless in the face of this declaration, as the relations of the princes and their States with British India which, in view of their treaties

with the Crown, had been considered insoluble became capable of adjustment. The whole problem of Indian self-government was in fact put on a new plane.

Besides, as the Maharaja did not fail to indicate, the future of the country was in itself a matter in which the princes felt a legitimate interest. The idea that there are 'two Indias' which could develop independently of each other never had his support. His profound faith as a patriotic Indian in the greatness of his motherland and the integral unity of the States with India found clear expression in this declaration:

'We, the princes, are Indians. We have our roots deep down in her historic past, we are racy of the soil. Everything which tends to the honour and prosperity of India has for us vital concern. Everything which retards her prosperity and shakes the stability of her institutions retards our own growth and lowers our stature.'

The adjustment of the relations of the States with a self-governing British India was therefore a matter of vital concern to the princes.

Federation and central responsibility having been accepted by the Conference, the task of working out the details was assigned to a Committee known as the Federal Structure Committee, with Lord Sankey as Chairman. It again fell to the Maharaja to put forward the views of the States in this Committee. In fact the proceedings of the Committee bear ample witness to the fact that, in determining the structure of the Federation as well as its content, the Maharaja played a predominant part. No wonder that, when the Maharaja left for India, the Secretary of State wrote to him in the following terms:

'It is not necessary for me to attempt to indicate the importance of the part you played at the Conference. The Conference, indeed, is not in the fullest sense, yet completed; and we are still too close to the picture to get the perspective required for estimating to what degree the results achieved

should be attributed to the efforts of this or that delegate. But I am sure that there is no one who could fail to realize the conspicuous part played by Your Highness or be blind to the transcendent importance of the decision which you took yourself and have induced other of your brother princes to take in choosing the path of Federation as the true road for India to follow towards the goal to which all her sons aspire for her.'

Lord Sankey, as Chairman of the Federal Structure Committee, was no less enthusiastic. He spoke of 'the great part' the Maharaja had played at the Conference and 'the splendid lead' he gave 'from first to last' and generously recognized that his own work as Chairman of the Federal Structure Committee 'would have been doubly difficult without the assistance and advice which I owe to you'.

Lord Sankey, in fact, expressed in the Committee itself his appreciation of the great part that the Maharaja played in the shaping of the general constitution. He said:

'We should place on record our great thanks to His Highness of Bikaner for the assistance and advice which he has given us throughout these proceedings, not only now [at the second Round Table Conference] but on the last occasion when we had the pleasure of meeting him. He is gifted, if he will allow me to say so, with great powers of speech and great powers of expression; but I know that he has had to work very hard in the evenings and in the early mornings, in order to place before us his views which have been so very helpful. It reconciles us a great deal to the difficulties we have had when we remember the courtesy and the skill with which he has endeavoured to solve them.'

The later history of the Federal proposals and the Maharaja's part in their development—though still unfinished—may in brief be appropriately alluded to here. The decision of the princes to accept a Federal solution was by no means unanimous even among the representatives in England. In India there were many rulers who

were suspicious of the wisdom of the course followed by the Maharaja and his friends at the Conference. The opposition came to a head with the return of the States' delegates to India, and a conflict of opinion between the two groups manifested itself in a way which weakened the position of the States at the second Conference. These differences cut deep into the ranks of the princes and rendered united action to safeguard the States' interests very difficult indeed. At the second Round Table Conference which the Maharaja attended, though his contribution to the detailed discussions was very valuable, he considered it desirable, in view of the cleavage of opinion in India, to take a less conspicuous part. But one thing he was determined to do. To bring about unity among his brother princes was most important, and on his return to India he used every endeavour to this end. In this he was ably supported by the Maharaja of Patiala, who was the head of the Confederationist party among the princes, and as a result of their joint efforts a Conference was arranged at Delhi early in 1932 at which the ministers representing the more important States in both groups were invited to attend. This Conference, which led to complete agreement between the two parties, laid the foundation of a consistent policy on the part of the princes by defining the essential safeguards under which they were prepared to enter the Federation.

Neither in the third Round Table Conference nor in the Joint Select Committee did the princes take any part, though the Maharaja's Prime Minister, Sir Manubhai Mehta, was nominated to these bodies and rendered conspicuous service to the princes in championing their cause and safeguarding their interests. The Maharaja's own interest, so far as the negotiations were concerned, was centred in securing for the smaller States, which looked to him for help, a fair share in the representation allotted to the States. For this purpose he prepared and

circulated numerous memoranda which claimed, on the analogy of federations elsewhere, that the units joining the Federation should have equal representation in the Upper House. Naturally such a demand, which tended to put the smallest Indian State on a position of equality with Hyderabad, Mysore, and Kashmir, met with the strongest opposition from the larger States. But the Maharaja's championship of the smaller States was not without beneficial results. When the allocation of seats in the Federal Legislature was decided it was found that the Government had as far as possible tried to accommodate the claim of the smaller States and a *via media* which was designed to satisfy both parties had been evolved, mainly as a result of the pressure that the Maharaja had brought to bear on the authorities.

Of the discussions that followed the publication of the draft Bill and the negotiations now proceeding with regard to the instrument of accession, it is not yet time to speak. But this much may be said. The Maharaja, while remaining a staunch advocate of federation, has always consistently claimed that the accession of the princes is dependent on their sovereignty and rights being adequately safeguarded. Whenever it has appeared to him that the rights of the States are being overlooked, he has not hesitated to speak out boldly and without reservation. At the Conference of Princes in Bombay on the 25th of February 1935 he took up a strong attitude and, in association with Their Highnesses of Bhopal and Patiala, wrote to the Viceroy putting forward the objections of the princes to the Bill. Thus, a champion of the federal scheme, he was also one of the staunchest champions of the States.

I



## *Chapter Fifteen*

### RECENT EVENTS

AFTER his return from the second Round Table Conference in November 1931 the Maharaja resolved to settle down to the work of internal administration. This had been his ambition from 1926, when he laid down the Chancellorship of the Chamber of Princes. It was hoped that he would be able now to devote greater attention to the affairs of his State, since he had divested himself of the responsibilities which he had voluntarily assumed and carried out with his usual thoroughness for over ten years. The appointment of Sir Manubhai Mehta to the Prime Ministership in 1927 was, as the Maharaja himself declared, intended to lighten the burden of an increasingly complex administration. But whatever the Maharaja's desire and intentions, political circumstances had, as has been said, stood in the way. The intense activity which followed the appointment of the Butler Committee and the work in connexion with the Round Table Conference kept both the Maharaja and his Prime Minister busy practically the whole time. Sir Manubhai especially was associated with every aspect of the work as the representative of the Maharaja at the Conferences, and while it could legitimately be said that he was able to relieve his Ruler of much of his burden, the Maharaja could not receive all the help that he had looked forward to in the administration of the State. With the Prime Minister devoting himself in an increasing degree to the complex problems arising out of the Federal proposals, the direct responsibility for the administration again fell on the Maharaja, whose absences from the State and preoccupations with affairs of wider importance were already having detri-

mental results on the government of the State. Also in 1929 Mr. Rudkin, who had served the State so nobly and so well, passed away. In all matters connected with revenue administration he had been the Maharaja's right-hand man. It was on his advice that the Maharaja had depended in the colonization and irrigation schemes which meant so much to the State. Between them there had always existed complete understanding. Mr. Rudkin's death was therefore an irreparable loss to the Maharaja, as he was deprived of the one man in whom he had confidence to make his canal scheme a success. This compelled the Maharaja to withdraw so far as possible from external affairs and concentrate his attention on his own State.

The year 1932, however, opened badly for him. His second son, Prince Bijey Singhji, who was a young man of exceptional promise, died as the result of a mishap from a gun. The tragedy was one which touched the Maharaja deeply, because the Prince was one cast in the very image of his father and held in especial affection by him. For many years he had been the Maharaja's constant companion and had accompanied him to the League of Nations, the Imperial Conference, and the first Round Table Conference. He had been adopted by the Maharaja's mother into the family of Maharaj Lall Singhji, which by giving both its sons in succession to the royal family had been threatened with extinction. His death came as a great blow to the Maharaja, but his stern sense of duty gave him courage to continue.

The Maharaja only plunged deeper into his work as a result of this domestic tragedy. He buried his sorrow in his files, and for a time withdrew more and more into himself. He took up one by one the long-standing disputes between the British Government and the State, such as the revival of the right of Bikaner to mint its own coins, increased supply of postage-stamps for government purposes, the revision of the agreement with regard

to salt, the retrocession of jurisdiction on railway lines—questions which were both political and administrative and had been kept pending because the Maharaja had not time to devote his attention to the details. The emergence of the federal scheme had made the settlement of these questions a matter of urgency, as under the new constitution all these subjects would pass under the Federation. With the Prime Minister devoting so much of his time in England to the discussion of federal issues, the burden of preparing these cases and fighting for the interests of the State fell on the Maharaja himself. He became again his own Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and revelled in the mass of work collected in the private secretary's office. Never since the first few years of his active administration had the Maharaja devoted himself so much to the State.

Another problem affecting the position of his State also became a matter of immediate concern to the Maharaja. The Round Table Conference had disclosed a divergence of interests among the States, especially in Rajputana. The pre-eminence of the Maharaja in the discussions and the importance which his experience, wisdom, and skill in negotiations gave to his views, re-kindled old jealousies. The representatives of certain States began openly to belittle the importance of Bikaner and to discuss even in public the necessity of an 'alliance' to keep the Maharaja in his place; and a minister of one State even said in the presence of the writer that no settlement which gave Bikaner equal status with other senior States would ever be acceptable to him. Two issues were involved in this controversy: one was the comparative position of Bikaner among the great States of Rajputana; the other was the allocation of seats in the Federal Upper House. In regard to the latter the Maharaja had always held the view that there should be no differentiation between sovereign States and that as

far as possible there should be equality of votes for the units in the Upper House which was designed to enshrine the federal principle. Even if some distinctions were inevitable, the Maharaja held that among States of more or less the same category no further division into classes based merely on population or revenue and the artificial gradations based on salutes, should be allowed to come into existence. In putting forward this demand the Maharaja was not really fighting for his own State. Considered from every point of view, there was no doubt that Bikaner was entitled to whatever the other major States received. But for him a fundamental principle was involved which was bound to create unnecessary class-distinctions among the Princes and States themselves.

The policy of the opposing group, which was generally known as 'the Alliance of the Bigger States', was that voting in the Upper House should go by importance. The Rajputana *bloc* in this alliance went one step farther and declared that in determining the importance of the States, what they claimed as 'the three premier States' should be given an exceptional position. A heated controversy followed as a result. Notes, circulars, memoranda, addressed to all the princes, issued in quick succession from the Maharaja. Some were controversial, others argumentative, but all were forceful and vigorous. Every one was dictated by the Maharaja himself and bore the impress of his vital personality. There was nothing haphazard or scrappy in them. Buttressed with numerous quotations, analyses of figures, and telling collections of facts, the Maharaja's writings on this controversy present an unanswerable array of arguments. But it is doubtful whether these documents, valuable as they undoubtedly were from the historical point of view, received as much attention as they deserved. For one thing they were addressed personally to the princes, who are notoriously disinclined to read long printed memoranda.

Secondly, against the Maharaja were ranged all the great States, with the solitary exception of Patiala; and, conscious of the weight they carried, they were impervious to all arguments and appeals however reasonable and however just. And yet it cannot be said that the Maharaja's work was wholly fruitless. Mainly as a result of his unceasing activity, the allocation of seats as finally determined by the Government of India was a compromise between the two extreme views—equality for all sovereign States advocated by the Maharaja and gradation according to individual importance as advocated by the Big States' Alliance. The *via media* that the Government followed, while it recognized the importance of the bigger States (including Bikaner) by giving them plural representation in the Upper House, weighted the scales in favour of the smaller States in a way which was generally recognized to be equitable.

The denial by some of the States of Rajputana of the importance of Bikaner also had another result. Tod, the enthusiastic historian of Rajasthan, had no opportunity to visit Bikaner, which in the days of his official life would indeed have been an adventure. The information which he collected and incorporated in his celebrated classic was supplied to him mainly by the *pandits* and scribes of Jodhpur and was therefore to some extent biased and in many cases inaccurate. Bikaner had suffered in official estimation mainly through the authority which Tod's romantic book came to have in the eyes of the Government of India and of the public generally. When 'the premier States' began to put forward the view that Bikaner, whatever the personal greatness of its present Maharaja, was not entitled historically to the position of one of the great States of Rajputana, the Maharaja decided to have the question examined from a purely historical point of view, and to show to the world that, ever since the foundation of the State by Rao Bikaji,

the House of Bikaner had by the valour, statesmanship, and achievements of its sons been recognized as one of the most important principalities in India. This resulted in the compilation of a book entitled *The House of Bikaner*, in which all the material relating to the position of the rulers of the State in the time of the Imperial Moghuls, in the inter-state history of Rajputana, and in the British period was collected and arranged. There was no argument, no propaganda, just a collection of records from unimpeachable sources, and the conclusion was unanswerable. The position of the Bikaner rulers in the Moghul Court had been second only to that of the rulers of Jaipur. Their services to the Empire, extending over a period of more than 150 years both in civil administration and in military campaigns, were altogether unsurpassed. Even at the time of British supremacy their military record was greater than that of any other State in Rajputana. But, quite apart from these claims, there was no denying the fact that whilst other Rajputana States had to pay tribute to the Mahrattas, Bikaner alone had maintained its independence unaffected during all that troubled period. *The House of Bikaner* was a crushing answer to the untenable claims of superiority which the representatives of some States had put forward.

In the meanwhile, an official utterance had referred to the States of Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur as 'the three premier States of Rajputana'. On the attention of the authorities being drawn to this, the Maharaja was assured, under the authority of the Viceroy, that there was 'no intention of excluding the Bikaner State from the category of the premier States of Rajputana' and that it was 'fully recognized that by historical tradition, precedence, size and present-day importance Bikaner is fully entitled to be included within such a description'.

Another event during recent years which attracted a great deal of attention outside the State, owing to the

activities of the States' Peoples Conference, was what was popularly known as the Bikaner conspiracy trial. A conspiracy trial is an unusual thing in an Indian State. The Bikaner case was perhaps the first of its kind, and it attracted wide attention both from the personality of the Ruler and the unprecedented character of the proceedings. The facts were briefly as follows: The activities of a body calling itself the Indian States' Peoples Conference and arrogating to itself the representation of the peoples of the different States have already been mentioned. The leaders of this subversive movement had specially chosen the Maharaja as the target of their attacks, both because of his prominence in the public eye and on account of his public exposure of their malicious activities. The Conference had been assiduous in vilifying the Maharaja and in trying to create disaffection in the State, and they were able to influence some of the discontented people in Bikaner to carry on their work there. The Maharaja, who was fully informed of the seditious activities of this small group, referred to the matter in a public speech and gave warning that if any officials, State subjects, or any one resident in his territory participated in this disloyal movement, his Government would be constrained to take legal proceedings. This warning went unheeded, and police reports showed that agitators who had made themselves specially notorious by their public activities against the State were being invited to the capital to advise and direct the seditious movement in the State. Funds were being openly collected for carrying on this agitation. The Maharaja decided that the time had come to take definite action, and on the 14th of January 1932 the police, under orders from the district magistrate, carried out house searches, and on the evidence of the material thus collected arrested the ringleaders. On the 13th of April complaints were lodged against the accused for sedition in the court of the district magistrate

of Bikaner. The accused, under advice from those who had encouraged them from outside the State, began, however, to take up an obstructionist attitude. It may be mentioned here that in the various conspiracy trials which were then taking place in British India, the procedure of the court had been so utilized by the accused as practically to bring the administration of justice into ridicule. With extraordinary ingenuity the provisions intended to safeguard the interests of the accused were so used as to hold up the proceedings. These methods, which had been perfected into a complete system in British India, were followed by the accused in their trial, and the State, anxious for its good name and anxious that no complaint of high-handedness should lie against it, had difficulties in meeting these tactics. In the sessions court, on one pretext or another, the accused began to threaten non-co-operation with the court, and when that was given up, on the advice of their own friends, to resort to hunger-strikes, &c. Their object was to prolong the hearing and keep up an agitation in British India that they were not having a fair trial. On the days fixed for hearing they continuously asked for adjournments, and the trial was thus made to drag on. From the conclusion of the prosecution evidence on the 24th of October 1933, and from the 1st of November when the oral statements were recorded, the accused requested and obtained adjournments of over thirty days. The written statement that they put in covered altogether over 1,000 pages, and yet the trial was carried out as expeditiously as possible, consistent with the interests of justice. On the 8th of January 1934 the judgement of the court was given finding the accused guilty under different charges and sentencing them to short terms of simple imprisonment.

The case received an extraordinary amount of publicity in British India, where reckless charges of persecution, ill treatment, and denial of justice were made even



in papers of acknowledged moderation and respectability. In Bombay a meeting alleged to consist of 'the prominent men of Rajasthan' was held under the presidency of a subject of Hyderabad State, and it appointed a committee named 'the Bikaner Political Case Committee' with the object of conducting a widespread campaign in British India in the interests of the accused. A 'Bikaner Day' was organized to draw the attention of the British Indian public and to exploit their sympathies, and meetings were organized in Bombay under the presidency of men well known in British Indian politics at which speeches were made condemning 'the indescribable horror and inhuman treatment' of the political offenders. The result was that for days the British Indian press was flooded with attacks on the Maharaja and his administration, and some of His Highness's friends in British India, influenced by the effects of this subtle propaganda, wired to him requesting his personal intervention in the case. As soon as the matter ceased to be *sub judice*, the Maharaja's Government issued a comprehensive note dealing with the whole question and exposing the tactics of the agitators in British India in seeking to spread disaffection and bring the administration into contempt by malicious propaganda.

This incident had an extraordinary sequel. A well-known and respected British Indian leader of Poona, Mr. N. C. Kelkar, who had been persuaded to become the president of the States' Peoples Conference, was invited by the Maharaja to meet him during His Highness's annual holiday in Bombay in June 1934. Mr. Kelkar had a long discussion with the Maharaja, who, in the words of Mr. Kelkar, put his point of view 'with open-mindedness and with frankness'. The Maharaja's intention was to point out how the good name of distinguished British Indian leaders was being exploited in a cause, the total unworthiness of which was masked by the profession of high ideals.

He was able to show to Mr. Kelkar's satisfaction that the record of the States' Peoples Conference was not one of agitation in the public interest. When the fact of this interview came to be generally known the vernacular press began a campaign of abuse against Mr. Kelkar himself, whose lifelong sacrifice in the interests of Indian nationalism was known to every one in India. Though Mr. Kelkar was surprised by these attacks, they had at least the benefit of revealing to him the true character of his erstwhile associates.

The year 1933 witnessed the completion of twenty-five years of wedded life of the Maharaja and Her Highness Maharani Bhatianiji Sahiba, the only surviving wife of the Maharaja. The marriage, as mentioned before, had taken place on the 3rd of May 1908. Outsiders are not privileged to know—owing to the strict purdah that prevails in the State—the great qualities of the Maharani Sahiba, but the Maharaja has always been grateful to Her Highness for the happiness and conjugal felicity that she has brought into his life. The Maharani's piety and charity are well known. There is no important temple or place of pilgrimage which has not benefited by Her Highness's charity. For the relief of suffering and for the benefit of the general public of Bikaner, she has always paid generously from her own privy purse. She takes a direct and genuine interest in the uplift of women, and especially in the educational and medical institutions for women in the State. It is due entirely to the Maharani's own initiative and powers of organization that the nobles' girls' school named after her was established in the capital. It is the first of its kind in Rajputana, where the girls of noble families can have a modern education under suitable purdah arrangements. Apart from the fact that the Maharani herself believed in the observance of purdah, she realized that, in considering the conservative

opinion of the aristocracy, she must satisfy their wishes that their children should be brought up according to the traditions of their families. The school was started, therefore, in the old Palace itself and began its career with twenty-eight students on the roll and ten boarders. Its success was immediate and was mainly due to the personal interest that Her Highness took in its affairs. In ten months the number of pupils went up to fifty and the number of boarders also increased from ten to eighteen. To-day the school is housed in a magnificent building on the main road to Lallgarh, with adequate arrangements of every kind and enclosing an ample area providing for gardens, playgrounds, and a gymnasium.

The married life of the Maharaja and Maharani has been one of exceptional happiness, the Maharani fully sharing with the Maharaja all his cares and responsibilities. The atmosphere of an Indian palace, secluded from outside interests, is generally regarded as one specially suited for intrigue; but Her Highness has always kept herself completely aloof from interference in State affairs, and when, unfortunately, intrigues of a political or family character have developed in the Palace, she has strongly supported the Maharaja in suppressing them. In every way her Highness proved herself to be a worthy helpmate to the Maharaja.

The silver wedding was therefore a day of great and genuine rejoicing. The celebrations were conducted without ostentation and in a spirit of profound thankfulness. At the banquet in honour of the occasion, the Maharaja broke through his ordinary reticence in matters connected with his family life and paid a generous tribute to his consort:

'I hope I shall not be considered immodest if to-night I make some reference to Her Highness and our happy married life of the past quarter of a century. It is at least a duty which I clearly owe to Her Highness personally; and I think you will agree

that it would be wrong on my part, if, out of any false notions of modesty, I did not refer to one to whom I owe so much. Her Highness has always given me constant assistance and support in bearing the heavy burdens and cares of my position, and in doing what I conceive to be my duty by my officers in the service of the State, and to my subjects, whose welfare is as much a matter of deep concern to Her Highness, as it has been to me.

‘Her Highness, as the consort of the Ruler of a State, has, if I may say so, not only maintained full well the very high standard and magnificent traditions of this ancient State and my House, but she has also been the embodiment of what a Rajput Princess and a consort ought to be—a model wife and a model mother, Her Highness has proved herself a truly worthy helpmate to me. Cheering me in all times of difficulty, stress, and anxiety, she has continuously and consistently been a source of inspiration, encouragement, and help to me in every way. She has been a safe repository of my confidence; and she has shared with me to the fullest extent all my great burdens and responsibilities. And in all this she has, whilst emulating the example set forth by my beloved and revered mother of not interfering or meddling in State affairs, nobly seconded my efforts in suppressing political intrigues and party factions in the State and at our Court.

‘A detailed examination of the unostentatious, silent and valuable work, and the many-sided activities of Her Highness the Maharani for the well-being of our beloved subjects, and particularly the earnest manner in which she has throughout striven for the advancement of the women and children of the Bikaner State, will prove how wrong the notions of ignorant people are as regards purdah, and of consorts and princesses and other Indian ladies who keep to the purdah.

‘At the moment one or two especial features are prominently before us, which demonstrate the success which has attended Her Highness’ keen personal interest and activities, with special reference to education and medical relief. I allude, of course, to the fine new spacious buildings, now actually under construction for the nobles’ girls’ school, including the boarding house for the kumaries, and to the new up-to-date women’s

general hospital, with all necessary modern appliances and equipment, the construction of which, too, is immediately to be taken in hand, in addition to the new general hospital for men.'

The British Government also in due time recognized the exceptional position of Her Highness among the consorts of Indian Rulers, and His Majesty awarded to her the much coveted decoration of the Crown of India, an order which is given but rarely and only in cases of outstanding merit or achievement. It was indeed a matter of genuine pleasure to His Highness that the philanthropic and charitable activities of his consort, and her abiding interest in the welfare of his people, should have received the recognition of the Imperial Government.

Sir Manubhai Mehta, who had fulfilled the onerous responsibilities of Prime Ministership, formally retired in 1934. The work of internal administration again fell in an increasing degree on the Maharaja himself. The Maharaja's own health was greatly strained by this addition to his normal work which was really more than an ordinary individual would be willing to undertake. But even so he did not neglect the affairs of his State, and though it involved continuous work in poring over files and dictating and approving drafts, he never flinched from his arduous task.

The return of the Maharaja to the direct administration of the State had another advantage. He was able to take up again the great building-programme which he always had in mind. The embellishment of Bikaner by providing it with noble public buildings has always been one of the things dearest to the Maharaja's heart. He had already provided it with public parks, wide and modern thoroughfares, and many buildings which would have added to the beauty of any capital. After 1932 he began a systematic and well-planned scheme to which the public also generously contributed. A museum, a stadium, sepa-

rate new hospitals for men and women costing over £100,000, a special building for the Maharani's nobles' girls' school, a public library, a theatre and cinema and many other buildings, designed from the point of view both of architectural beauty and of public utility, were undertaken and completed within the last two years. The enthusiasm of the Maharaja in building has proved contagious. The nobility of Bikaner has also awakened to the necessity of modern houses, and the more progressive of them have followed the Maharaja in removing from the congested areas in the city, where their ancestral town houses were situated, into the new areas.

The people of Bikaner have not been slow to appreciate the work of their Ruler. In the beautiful park, they decided to erect an equestrian statue of the Maharaja who had done so much for them and for their State. In 1934 Lord Willingdon visited Bikaner personally to unveil the statue and paid the Maharaja the following tribute:

'Nothing could possibly give me more pleasure than to join with Your Highness' loyal subjects in the State of Bikaner and to pay my tribute of affection and admiration to their Ruler by taking the principal part in this ceremony for which we are all gathered together to-day, and further, to unveil this memorial which will always remind future generations of your outstanding services to the people of your State.

'But it seems to me that this statue I shall shortly unveil will always call to mind, apart from its more local interest, the memory of a great Ruler who by his untiring public work in many fields has made the name of the House of Bikaner widely known in many lands. His great services to the British Empire through the years of the Great War and as a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, his labours at meetings of the Imperial Conference and League of Nations at Geneva, and his devoted work for the great scheme of federation for this country will always be remembered in future years. And if I turn to the more local aspect of this ceremony, I am reminded of an old

Latin saying—"Si monumentum requiris, circumspice", which in English reads: "If you seek a monument, look round."

'Let us therefore turn away for a moment from this veiled statue and allow our eyes to dwell upon all we see around us of a man's handiwork, and summon to the mind's eye what we know to lie beyond the range of our present vision.

'We see a vista of fine buildings and public gardens laid out with a meticulous eye to convenience and artistry. Our minds envisage the sweep of well-kept roads, the outward signs of the widespread electrification of this capital, many works of domestic, commercial, and economic value: hospitals, schools, and administrative blocks, palatial residences, and neatly laid out bungalows. Further afield, the face of the country-side bears witness of the struggle to soften the unrelenting harshness of nature, and far to the north a great canal system speaks of a Ruler's accomplished aim to bring agriculture to desolate and barren tracts: to force from unresponsive earth some meed of prosperity for a desert people. And as you note this evidence of one man's rule, you will perhaps turn your eyes with me to that Fort which stands before us. The spirit that lives in that Fort must surely know that His Highness Sir Ganga Singh of Bikaner has not betrayed his ancestors, nor the glories of the past; that that Fort, steeped, in its slumbering beauty, in the great traditions of bygone years, does not lie humbled by the surroundings of a later day: that what went into the building of that Fort was not in vain. Such, Your Highness, is your monument.'

In April 1935 the Maharaja left for England to take part in the Jubilee celebrations of His late Majesty, King George V. His Highness' visit was in his capacity as an honorary aide-de-camp of the King. No Indian Princes other than those attached to the staff of the King had been invited. The Maharaja, along with his colleagues, took part in all the ceremonials connected with the Jubilee. It was a matter of the most genuine pleasure to him, as he had been attached to His Majesty's staff for over thirty-four years and their relations in the meantime

had grown on the part of the Maharaja into a cherished feeling of the most respectful admiration and devotion. His Majesty on his part had also invariably shown him the greatest kindness and consideration. To participate in His Majesty's Jubilee was therefore much more than an official honour with him. It was also an act of personal homage and thanksgiving, especially as the Maharaja had the feeling that in view of His Majesty's failing health he might not in this life have a further opportunity of seeing his Emperor.

The demise of the King, nevertheless, came as a shock to him, and the whole of Bikaner mourned with him the loss of a beloved King-Emperor. The Maharaja felt that he had lost not only a sympathetic and gracious Emperor, but a sincere and kind friend whose interest in himself and his State had been shown in such a marked degree on different occasions.



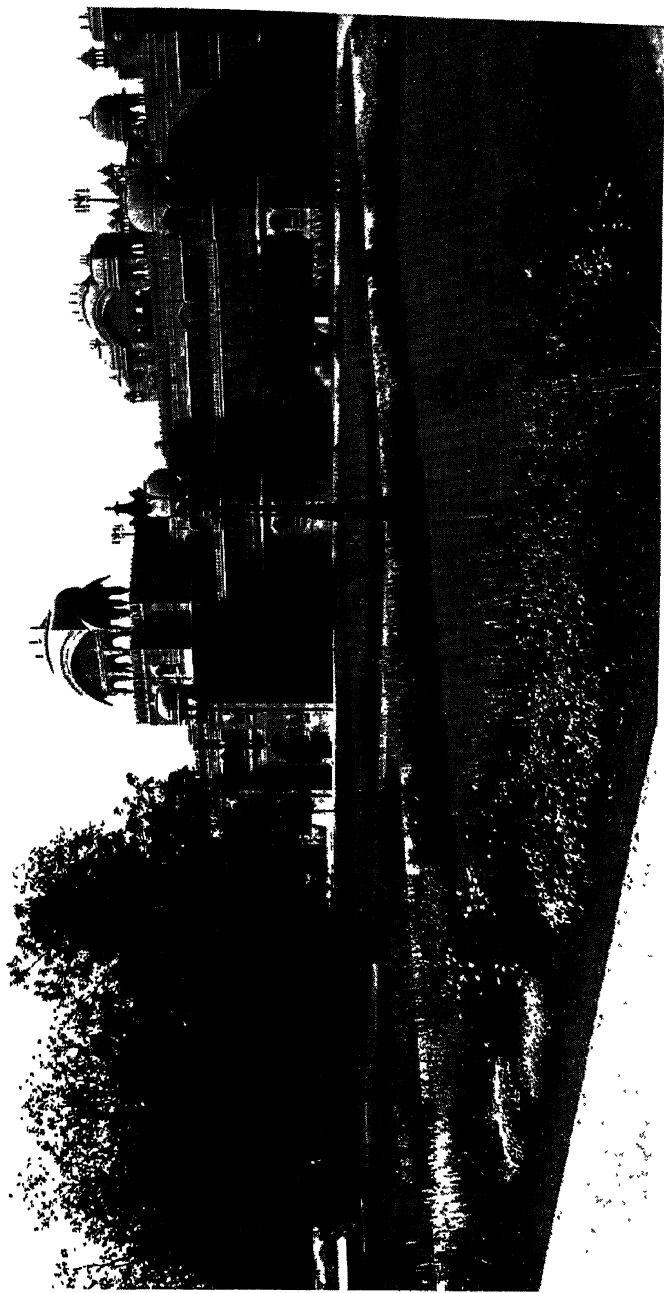
## *Chapter Sixteen*

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS

THE 'appreciation' of the Maharaja's personality which Sir Walter Lawrence, who has had the privilege of knowing him almost from childhood and who has had exceptional opportunities of watching every phase of his career, has contributed to this volume, and which is added as a supplementary chapter, leaves nothing for me to add regarding Maharaja Ganga Singhji—as a man and a friend. But some outstanding characteristics of the Maharaja may be briefly touched upon from a different point of view to that from which Sir Walter has approached the subject.

As a Ruler the Maharaja has always held that it is his duty and his right to give his best to his people. When he alludes to himself as the first servant of the State as well as its sovereign, he is giving expression to something in which he profoundly believes. All his activities are coloured by this faith that whatever God has given him—ability, energy, vision, and leadership—is to be utilized solely for the benefit of the State. In the result the Maharaja is by nature not only a personal Ruler, one who takes direct responsibility for every act of administration, but one who believes that it is his duty to initiate and organize every important aspect of the government of the State. It may be said that this is the belief of every autocratic ruler; but the difference is that the Maharaja tries sincerely to live up to this ideal.

For the greater part of his reign he has been his own Prime Minister. His hours of work and daily routine are regulated by his own conception of duty. To see the Maharaja sitting at his office table surrounded by his numerous stenographers and secretaries and poring



The Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner



over files and correcting drafts is to have a new notion of what an Indian Maharaja can be. In the earlier days of his reign, when typewriting had come little into vogue, the more important drafts were often written in his own hand. Even now no important letter ever issues either from himself or from his Government without the Maharaja correcting it himself. His normal working day begins at eight o'clock whether he is in Bikaner, Gajner, or Bombay. Seated at the head of his table with a number of red and blue pencils of gigantic size on either side, he begins his dictations to the assembled stenographers. It may be an important letter to the Viceroy or to a brother prince, or a comprehensive memorandum on some important public question, or it may be only a routine note on a file; but each one is dealt with by the Maharaja with meticulous care. Stenographers go with their note-books filled and others take their place; but the Maharaja goes on working till about eleven-thirty, when he retires for his religious observances and midday meal. After a little rest, at 2.30 p.m. the work begins afresh. The ministers and heads of departments are received and instructed personally. Plans for new buildings are examined, works in progress inspected in person, schemes under consideration discussed in committee with ministers. Often the Maharaja keeps at his work till late in the evening. At night either he dines with his family inside the Palace or joins his guests for an informal meal, casting aside the cares of State.

A Ruler who works so hard is naturally a stern task-master. He has no patience with those who are haphazard or are not thorough in whatever work they do. It is not sufficient for him that any one should have come to the right conclusion or done the right thing. It is essential that the conclusion should have been arrived at in the right way. Himself most methodical in work, he naturally distrusts intuition and attaches importance to

the manner in which everything is done. It may be said that he places too much value on detail and does not sufficiently appreciate the value of imagination. But it must be remembered that imagination, important though it is, can come into play only in the shaping of policies; administration must inevitably be governed by method, and as matters of policy can only be decided by him, the Maharaja is undoubtedly right in insisting on method on the part of his officers.

Perhaps it is this quality of the Maharaja which has been responsible for the fact that in spite of the long span of his reign he has not been able, with one or two exceptions, to gather round him men of talent or exceptional ability. Genius in a ruler is sometimes described as the ability to gather round him men of genius. But history provides numerous instances of rulers whose genius was of the other kind: direct administration through men who carried out loyally the orders of their master. Frederick the Great, Joseph II, Napoleon himself, in fact most of the autocrats who changed the character of their States were men who did the work themselves as well as conceiving and shaping the policies of their governments. The Maharaja belongs to this category. All his officers were content to follow. Whenever his master hand was withdrawn for a time from the control of the administration, the tendency for things to slip back became apparent. Ten years of occupation with Imperial and Indian politics had this clear effect, which forced the Maharaja, much against his instinct, to appoint a prime minister. But even with a Prime Minister whose experience and wisdom were recognized it was impossible for the Maharaja to get the relief which he so earnestly desired, but which his own conception of duty prevented him from enjoying.

This is not the place for a discussion of the comparative merits of different systems of government—of democracy

and autocracy. The Maharaja, while firmly believing in the benevolence of personal rule by a sovereign who realizes his own responsibilities, has always been alive to the weakness of the system. For bad rulers who forgot their responsibility to the State and the duties of their exalted position he had no sympathy. A prince who was a bad ruler in his opinion was a grave menace not only to his State and to his subjects but also to his brother princes.

‘For every such prince’, he said, ‘does incalculable harm to his Order, and the sooner some wholesome check is put on the harmful activities of such a ruler, the better for the princes, the States and their subjects, and all concerned. It is rulers of this type who afford opportunity to the enemies of the States and their rulers to paint a picture of all the States, and all rulers and their governments, in the same colours. Human nature being what it is, it is impossible, as has been pointed out on more occasions than one in the past, to expect every one of the hundred and eight rulers of States, who are members of the Chamber of Princes in their own right, to be all of exactly the same mould; and it is, alas! inevitable that there should be a few bad rulers amongst the Order. And I for one hold that it is in the best interests of the princes and States to see to it, and let it be known by every means at their command, not only amongst the princes themselves and the States, but to every one in the wide world, that such rulers cannot, and should not, expect sympathy or support from their Order—in fact, that such really bad rulers (of whom we can thankfully and truly say there are only a few) should, so to speak, be ostracized and excommunicated by their own Order.’

He recognized more than any one else the grave harm that was being done to the States in general by the misrule of a few. In such a large body as the princes of India, a few cases of misrule are inevitable; but all the same the injury to the prestige and position of the rulers that such cases do is great, and the Maharaja’s constant advice to his brother Princes to put their houses in order is due

to his realization that popular opinion would judge the entire Order not by the success with which many rulers carry on their administration but by the failure of a few.

Whatever the merits and demerits of particular forms of government, it will perhaps be recognized that the achievements recorded in the foregoing pages could have been possible only through personal government. No democracy, however broad-based and perfect in theory, could have initiated and carried through the great changes which the Bikaner State has witnessed during the last thirty-five years. It was the prestige due to the hereditary rulership of the Maharaja, the continuity of policy enabling wise planning extending over many years, the economy and wise control which a benevolent personal rule made possible, that enabled the Maharaja to build his railways, undertake great irrigation works, and create all the machinery of a modern State out of the limited resources which he inherited. It was only personal government conducted with the single object of the welfare of the State that could have transformed a land still in a condition of medieval feudalism into a government of modern times. It was a leap which covered centuries, and it may well be doubted whether any other method of government could have achieved it.

His belief in the virtues of a wise paternal government did not mean for the Maharaja the exclusion of the people from association with the administration. He realized early in his reign that it was necessary to approximate the conditions of his State to changing ideas and gradually to associate his subjects in the business of government. The administrative conferences, the Legislative Assembly, the municipalities and local boards which he gradually established in the State bear witness to this realization that in the changing circumstances of India an autocracy, however benevolent, will not be enough. In his wisdom he knew that it was better to make these

changes on his own initiative and thereby secure strength to his government than be forced by circumstances to yield unwillingly and with bad grace.

The Maharaja's outstanding gift is his flair for politics. He is able to judge the merits of a political issue and to take a decision accordingly. His imagination can visualize in broad aspects the fundamental questions of policy without being impeded by petty details. His Rome note on the necessity of Indian reforms when even the Declaration of 1917 had hardly been thought of, his statesmanlike acceptance of the principle of federation at the first Round Table Conference are the two striking instances of this unique gift of the Maharaja. In the activities of the Chamber of Princes and in the formulation of the policy of the princely Order, it was this quality of his mind that earned him general admiration.

With a political mind goes inevitably a combative personality. The Maharaja is not afraid to hit out against political opponents and is in no way offended if they hit back. The famous speech at the Savoy Hotel when he fearlessly entered the lists on behalf of British Indian advance, frankly answered the diehards of the Indo-British Association and mercilessly exposed their tactics is still remembered as the most outspoken utterance on a political question by an Indian Prince. His controversies with princes, political officers, and British Indian leaders have been many, and while never exceeding the bounds of courtesy, he has unsparingly used all his great controversial skill to the discomfiture of his opponents. The controversy with Sir Robert Holland about the simplification of political relations in which, in a note covering over 100 printed pages of foolscap, he relentlessly exposed the assumptions and arguments of that officer in favour of retaining his own office; the controversy with the confederation group of princes in favour of federation; the numerous memoranda issued to maintain



the right of States to equal and individual representation in the Federal Upper House; and the speeches in which he smote the States' Peoples Conference hip and thigh are examples of the Maharaja's combative powers. While he himself never carries malice into his controversies, it is not to be expected that those who are unfortunate enough to be the targets of his attacks can easily forget their discomfiture. This is the reason why the Maharaja, for all his services to the princely Order, has never been a popular personality with some of his brother princes. His notorious inability to suffer fools gladly has given him the reputation of being intolerant. His controversial methods—unexceptional in themselves but unusual in the case of an Indian prince—have created too many wounds that rankle. Nor does he care for mere popularity. Firm in the conviction of his own rectitude, he will not compromise with human weakness merely to secure popularity.

Essentially a soldier, statesman, and administrator, the Maharaja is little moved by the appeal of the arts. He does not share the literary tradition of the Bikaner family, and books attract him mainly for their utility. His reading is confined to the subjects that immediately interest him, and literature as such has no charms for his mind. While the Maharaja has a well-trained ear for music, it cannot be said that either by his patronage or by his deep interest he is a devotee of music. So far as painting is concerned, the Maharaja's interests are mainly in regard to the subject treated than to the art itself. His collection of wild-game paintings is probably unique, and the modern sculpture of animals which decorates the Lallgarh Palace is fit for a great museum. But neither in painting nor in sculpture as such is he interested. In architecture alone, as befits a great builder, the Maharaja has a deep and genuine delight. His knowledge of the details of design and construction gives to his interest in architecture the

quality and outlook of a critic and not of a dilettante. His lack of humanistic interest gives to the Maharaja a mainly utilitarian outlook on life. In personal life, as in administration, the utility of a thing is the Maharaja's first consideration, and consequently there is a rigidity and inelasticity in his general ideas. It was therefore not by versatility but by concentration on things of immediate interest that the Maharaja achieved greatness.

While His Highness is not versatile in the sense that his gifts do not cover a wide range of unrelated subjects, in the different departments of administration he is versatile in the true sense. He has a complete mastery of subjects so different from the administrative point of view as revenue, engineering, public health, and finance. Naturally, as his own Prime Minister, unless he was able to handle each one of these subjects under his immediate control, he could not exercise effective supervision.

The most notable characteristic of the Maharaja as a great Indian Prince is his dislike of display. The wanton and profligate ostentation which is considered by many in Europe to be the mark of an oriental potentate is totally absent in the Maharaja's life. In the midst of much extravagance, which even the smaller among the princes consider essential for the maintenance of their dignity, the moderation of the Maharaja is a shining exception. He knows the vital difference between necessary pomp in the life of a ruler and the vulgar display of wealth and circumstance. His entertainments both in Europe and India reflect this characteristic. There is a deliberate avoidance of anything that looks like vain ostentation. He entertains always like a connoisseur and not like a new American millionaire who judges the value of everything by the price he has paid for it. In his private life he is a simple and unaffected gentleman. Neither by resplendent dress nor by the display of wealth and ceremony does he attract attention. Though his personality and bearing mark

him out in any company as a great Prince and as one accustomed to command, there is no external paraphernalia that proclaims to the world his rank or position. But pomp and ceremony cannot be excluded from the life of an Indian prince. On such occasions the Maharaja does what is expected of one in his position. On the Dusserah durbar and similar occasions the traditional oriental potentate displaces the modern Ruler. Where pomp and ceremony are to be observed for the prestige of the State or the dynasty the Maharaja, however much he may personally dislike ostentation, does not fail to observe what is right and do what is expected of him. And it may be added that the strict etiquette of the court that prevails on such occasions is such as would have put Escorial or Versailles into the shade. For the Maharaja rightly insists that in a State of such continuous tradition, the formality and etiquette which surround the Ruler on formal occasions should be fully maintained. In ordinary life, however, he prefers the life of a private gentleman, dressed undoubtedly in the fashion but without unnecessary display.

As a Ruler he has the exceptional virtue of persistence. Once he takes up a matter, nothing can divert him from his purpose and he is prepared patiently to wait, using both the *fortiter in re* and *suaviter in modo* which Lord Chesterfield recommends as the essentials of success in worldly affairs. No one knows better when to be strong and unyielding. Equally the Maharaja knows by instinct when not to press a point and to use the pleasanter methods of *suaviter in modo*. The most remarkable example of his persistence was in regard to the Sutlej Valley canal. The scheme was originally mooted in 1905: it was only in 1927 that water began to flow through the Gang Canal. A smaller man, not gifted with the vision and persistence of the Maharaja, would have given up the scheme as hopeless in view of the

determined opposition from many quarters, the delays and difficulties inevitable in bureaucratic administrations, and the great responsibility of financing a gigantic scheme, which was after all a great gamble as events elsewhere showed. In big matters as in small, the Maharaja displays the quality of persistence. He never fights a case which he knows to be weak and never gives up a fight merely because he has met with a rebuff. He re-examines his own case, strengthens his arguments, and puts it forward again.

Without initiative and driving capacity no one can be a successful ruler or administrator. From his early days the Maharaja gave the fullest evidence of these qualities. He was but nineteen when as his own famine officer he initiated, organized, and carried out a most comprehensive scheme of relief which won for him the unstinted admiration of men like Lord Curzon and Sir Denzil Ibbetson. The whole record of his reign during the last thirty-eight years bears witness to these qualities of the Maharaja. In personal rule, where, as in the case of the Maharaja, the officers mainly carry out the orders, the initiative and organization have perforce to be supplied from above; and except when the Maharaja was otherwise engaged, either in the interests of the Empire or of the princes and States in general, that initiative has never been lacking in Bikaner.

Of his organizing ability any one who has gone to Bikaner will bear witness. What Sir Samuel Hoare has recorded is perhaps the most interesting, coming as it does from one whose organizing abilities have been proved in many fields.

'Not, however, content with the lavish hospitality of Bikaner, His Highness transported the whole of this army upon the second day to Gajner, his hunting palace, at a distance of 20 miles, where after two days' stay every one returned again to the capital. Within these broad strategic movements there were

constantly changing tactical dispositions, for State ceremonies, tennis, and sand-grouse shooting. Hour by hour army orders appeared upon the notice-board, politely and conveniently directing each guest to his partner for dinner, or the motor-coach that was to transport him, or the butt that was to shelter him for a duck or grouse shoot. Never have I dreamed of an entertainment carried out upon so spacious a scale. The Maharaja, with his long record of wise administration and his equally long row of service medals, has so many claims upon the admiration of Englishmen that he needs no further testimonial from a stray visitor like myself. I will only therefore say that when I looked around at my 150 fellow-guests, and the swift and smooth arrangements that were made for their comfort, I felt that I was in the house of a Napoleon of hospitality.<sup>1</sup>

For one whose *forte* is organization and administration, it is perhaps not unnatural to judge everything by results. The Maharaja has no use for paper schemes however perfect they may appear and however beneficial they may seem. Nor do complicated figures of statistics impress him. He must see the results in something tangible, definite, and concrete. Nor has he, in consequence of this organizing bias of his mind, any patience with people incapable of taking decisions. To play with files is the bureaucratic game: for notes to come and go from one office to another, for wordy warfare which does not touch the core of the question. The Maharaja hates nothing more than this. In public speeches and in office orders he is constantly telling his ministers and secretaries that the bureaucratic game of playing at football with files does not appeal to him, and that his officers must take decisions and put into effect what is decided instead of writing innumerable notes on them.

Yet there is a great strain of caution in the Maharaja which makes him distrust new ideas and wary in taking up proposals which have not been carefully scrutinized

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *India by Air*, Sir Samuel Hoare, pp. 99-100.

from every point of view. The most attractive schemes mean nothing to him unless they have been worked out in the fullest detail, and even then his approval of them is likely to be subject to conditions and clauses which may look at first sight the safeguards of a timid mind. In fact, they are far from being the results of timidity. Being thorough in everything he does, he cannot accept from others ready-made conclusions. He must satisfy himself that every scheme is what it claims to be, not only in outline or in essentials but in all important details. Once he is satisfied on this point, the Maharaja is quick to reach a decision.

A staunch and genuine friend, it is claimed for the Maharaja that during the last thirty-eight years since he attained the age of responsibility, he has never lost a friend. To one who has such a large circle of friends both in India and in England this may be a large claim to make; but it is none the less true. The friends of his youth have only become dearer to him with the passage of time. With his old friends he keeps up a steady correspondence, which seldom deals with political or administrative problems. The prospects of grouse-shooting, the social events of Bikaner, the personal affairs of the Maharaja and his friends: these and other matters of mutual interest fill the pages of those letters.

The Maharaja's attachment to his family and his happy married life have already been touched upon. For a ruler living in isolation in his capital, where his position makes it impossible for him to associate freely with others, life is apt to be dull and uninteresting. The Maharaja therefore finds his relaxation in the bosom of his family, lavishing his love and affection on his grandchildren, and in turn loved by them. To their education and training he devotes infinite care, especially to the proper upbringing of the elder son of the heir apparent who is the heir in the third generation. They are housed separately under his

own personal care; and he finds great happiness in watching them grow up in the true traditions of his House. This happy domestic life provides him with the necessary counterpoise for the hard labour which so occupies his attention.

The only relaxation that he permits himself is his shikar. A crack shot, and lover of wild life, the Maharaja is devoted to that sport. In Bikaner itself there is but little big game. The shooting for which he has made his State famous is wild duck and grouse. The imperial sand-grouse shoot at Gajner during the Christmas season has attained the position of a prominent social event, invitations to which are cherished greatly by all who love sport. The number of guests amounts sometimes to a hundred, and in the beautiful surroundings of Gajner with its palace on the lake and its deer-parks, they are entertained to what each of them remembers as a most remarkable experience. The arrangements for the shoot are not only perfect but are made with due consideration for the convenience of every guest.

Apart from this, the Maharaja, especially in his younger days, was a keen enthusiast for tiger-shooting. Bikaner has no tiger of its own, and therefore the Maharaja either makes private arrangements or goes to other States more fortunately situated in this respect. He has shot over 150 tigers, chiefly in the jungles of Kotah, Gwalior, Bhopal, Datia, and other States and he has been one of the few Indian rulers invited by the Government of Nepal for the splendid shoot which the Terai of that country alone can provide. His trophies though by no means unique—in this matter he is eclipsed by his own son the Maharajkumar who is a real mighty hunter of the forest—form an interesting collection, especially in view of the fact that, unlike some of his brother princes, they have not been collected in the spirit of a big-game hunter who goes from country to country looking for



The Gajner Palace where the Maharaja entertains snipe-shooting parties





game. The Maharaja though a keen sportsman is a keener ruler and never allows his desire for sport and the excitement of the chase to interfere with his duties.

The Maharaja's year is very carefully planned in advance. It has something of the rigidity of a steel frame, unavoidable in the case of all who desire to utilize to the fullest extent every minute of their lives. The New Year opens with the parting Christmas guests and the Maharaja settles down to two months of hard work. He has perhaps staying with him three or four intimate friends who come to him practically every year in winter to relieve the stress of his life. Between January and the middle of March, the Maharaja is busy with the details of State administration, but he generally finds time for two semi-official visits to Delhi; either in connexion with the Chamber of Princes or in pursuance of any negotiations concerning his own State. By the end of March, when the heat in Bikaner becomes unbearable, the Maharaja generally leaves for a big-game shoot. But even in camp work goes on in the same way as in Bikaner. By the middle of May he generally travels to Bombay, where in his own house overlooking the sea, he spends his annual holiday ranging from a month to six weeks. The word holiday is a misnomer, for though the Maharaja is relieved from much of the routine work connected with the State while in Bombay, he keeps himself as busy as ever with affairs connected with Indian States and with the problems of British India. With the first fall of rain in Bikaner the Maharaja and the Maharani return to the capital, usually in the first week of July, perhaps after spending a few days at Mount Abu, the hill-station to which the younger members of the family retire during the heat. From July to Dusserah, generally in the first week of October, Bikaner though hot, is pleasant in the evening. The Maharaja seldom if ever leaves the State at that time, as the utilization of every drop of water which falls during

these months is the thing nearest to his heart. Whenever a shower, however slight, has fallen the Maharaja drives round to the various *bunds* to see whether there is the least wastage of water, and his main concern during that period is the weather reports which arrive at stated times. The approach of the monsoon to some place near Bikaner, announced in the telegrams is always underlined and re-read.

Dusserah of course is the time of celebration. Though in every State it is a time of rejoicing, it is especially so in Bikaner as it coincides with the Maharaja's birthday. In olden times, with Dusserah began the season of military operations. The rains were over and the overpowering heat of the Indian sun had cooled down. Military reviews, the assembling of feudal hosts, homage of vassals, reception of ambassadors, and other preparations for the annual campaign, either for conquest or to reduce the overbearing nobles, were in full swing. To-day these are gone through only in symbols. The summons goes forth to the chiefs and nobles who arrive in state in the capital, with retinues which are but a slender imitation of the hosts which accompanied them in an earlier age. The Maharaja goes in a State procession, holds his *darbar* at which he receives the homage of his nobles and entertains them to a banquet. There are no wars to fight, and they disperse quietly to their homes. The Maharaja now settles down to three months of hard work. Visitors, some official, like the Viceroy and the Agent to the Governor-General, but mainly unofficial from different parts of the world, come and go, after enjoying the Maharaja's hospitality and, if his special friends, after participating in a shoot or two. But the even tenor of the Maharaja's life is hardly interrupted. He tours the State, for the November months are cool and healthy, inspects district offices, interviews local magnates, and shoots where anything good is to be found. With the middle of

December arrangements for the annual Christmas shoot, which is both a political and social institution, are in hand. Guests begin to arrive by the 23rd of December and on the Christmas Eve every available accommodation for guests is taken up. Usually the guests depart by the end of the year and the same routine begins again.

In a life organized in so purposeful a manner, the Maharaja combines in a suitable degree hard work with relaxation. A great and painstaking Ruler, immersed in every detail of the government of a large State, the Maharaja is also a perfect host, whose hospitality and gracious charm are so well described by Sir Walter Lawrence. He is also a staunch friend and an affectionate and dutiful head of the family. No doubt a ruler can possess many of these personal qualities without being a great ruler. What makes the Maharaja exceptional is the combination of what may, without offence, be called the bourgeois qualities with characteristics which mark him also as a great Ruler. Initiative, organization, leadership and command over men, wisdom in counsel, and intrepidity in action. It is this combination which makes Maharaja Ganga Singhji both a great gentleman and a great Prince.

Sufficient has been said in previous chapters to enable an impartial estimate to be formed of the Maharaja's work. One who sees Bikaner to-day and understands its great position in the Indian Empire requires an effort of imagination to picture what Bikaner was when the Maharaja assumed the reins of government. The revenue of the State was a bare £130,000. There were neither roads nor railways to speak of. Canal irrigation was unknown. The peasantry, dependent on a precarious rainfall, lived under the perpetual menace of famine and scarcity. A second crop was unknown. The land was not properly settled: there was no modern code of laws or proper system of judicial administration. The people had

no voice or interest in the administration. A recalcitrant nobility, unbending in its conservatism, defied the authority of the State. The administrative system, such as it existed, was medieval in its organization and corrupt to the core. Naturally, for all its fine historical tradition, the Bikaner State counted for little in Indian affairs and was hardly known outside the borders of Rajputana.

The position to-day shows a remarkable transformation. Acknowledged as one of the premier States of Rajputana, the voice of Bikaner counts not only in Indian States' affairs but in the general politics of India and the Empire. The State itself has been changed beyond recognition. A modern administration looks after the welfare and prosperity of the State. Nearly 1,000 square miles have been recovered from the grip of the desert and changed into pleasant gardens. The benefits of a peaceful and civilized government, security of person and property, an advanced judicial system where every man's rights are guaranteed and maintained, a strong and efficient service for the maintenance of law and order, an expanding system of education and medical services, have replaced the medieval machinery of government which the Maharaja inherited. The foundations of popular government have been well and truly laid by the institution of the Legislative Assembly and municipal and local boards. A well-knit and efficient system of railways, 800 miles in length, connects every part of the State with the capital and brings every man near to the Maharaja. The chiefs and nobles, once so defiant, have realized that their future lies in the service of their State and their Ruler and, under full encouragement from the Maharaja, have truly become the pillars of State. The *ryots* and agriculturists under the care of a paternal Government have not only become prosperous, self-reliant, and contented but have developed a proper pride in belonging to a State which is in the vanguard of progress.

These remarkable results have been achieved mainly through the initiative and activities of the Maharaja himself. He had undoubtedly the help of competent European and Indian officials. The Maharaja has never hesitated to harness to his service the most competent technical officers and experts, whether Indian or European, whether from another State or from British India. His relations with such officials have not only been cordial and considerate but based on an appreciation of the value of expert technical advice. For many years Mr. Rudkin, a European officer who was an expert in colonization and revenue matters, was, as mentioned before, his trusted adviser and it was on him that the Maharaja mainly depended to make the colonization scheme a success. His place is now occupied by a distinguished Indian officer from the Punjab, Rai Bahadur Jai Gopal, who, as colonization minister, carries on that work under the direct supervision of the Maharaja. In the same way in matters relating to the railways, the Maharaja has always turned to the advice of another British officer, Mr. J. Fearfield, while in his building activities he has been helped by several European chief engineers. Though great credit is undoubtedly due to these technical officers, it should not be forgotten that the responsibility for initiating a policy and determining the course and pace of its working has always been with the Maharaja. His technical officers were experts whose opinions he valued and whose advice he always sought. But the decision was entirely his own and to this extent it may justifiably be claimed that all that has been achieved in Bikaner during the last thirty-five years is thanks to the Ruler himself.

No less is the transformation in the position of the princes during the last quarter of a century due to his devotion to the cause of the States and princes as a whole. The proud spirit of the Maharaja felt deeply the galling humiliations of Lord Curzon's time, when princes were,

in his own words, 'treated as if they were on ticket-of-leave', when their free movement was curtailed, when objection was taken even to the colour of the liveries worn by their servants, when extravagant claims were put forward on behalf of the paramount power denying the sovereignty of the Indian rulers and contesting even their claim to be called princes. The gradual recovery of the sovereignty and rights of the States during the last quarter of a century, which is one of the outstanding political factors in modern Indian history, is to a very considerable extent the result of the Maharaja's activities. We have seen how his Highness, as early as 1910, began thinking about an organization for safeguarding the interests of princes, how in 1914, he actually put forward proposals for a Council of Princes and how, mainly through his efforts, the Princes' Conference was established which later on became the Chamber of Princes. In his work for the princes the Maharaja, fortunately for himself and for the States, was not left single-handed. He had the advantage of the closest co-operation and advice of rulers of the eminence of Maharaja Madhava Rao Scindia, the Maharaja of Patiala, and the Maharaja Ranjitsinghji of Nawanagar. But the brunt of active work from 1916 to 1926 fell on him, first as General Secretary of the Princes' Conference and later as the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes.

The extraordinary feature of this thirty years' fight for freedom, beginning with mild protests against intervention by the political agents and the agents to the Governor-General to the united demand of the princes in 1929, is that it has left no scar on the Maharaja, who though a born fighter, was a most courteous opponent. The Political Department against whose powers he and his colleagues were ranged were adepts in the arts of jesuitical casuistry when it suited their purpose, and in the policy of the strong arm and the mailed fist. In the early days the

Maharaja himself felt its unseen strength as, for example, when it began to be whispered in official circles that he was a disloyal prince. But the Maharaja was equally an expert in the methods of pressing political claims, and he has never had a single personal quarrel arising out of all the controversies he has had to carry on during these years. His relations with political secretaries and other representatives of the Government of India, even while he was engaged in the most serious controversies affecting the States as a whole, were most friendly and cordial. He always recognized and often gave generous expression to his recognition of the fact that the Political Department, apart from the maintenance of the claims of paramountcy, had generally upheld the rights of the States and fought their battles in difficult circumstances: that if there were some officers who attached an exaggerated importance to their functions, there were many who were the true friends and champions of the rulers and their States. The Maharaja in his criticism of the system never forgot the difficulties of the individual and the sympathy of many high political officers, many of whom he counts amongst his intimate personal friends.

The Maharaja's activities, especially after 1913, were in no way confined to the interests of Bikaner or of the States in general. His services to the cause of Indian nationalism are such as to entitle him to an honoured place among the ranks of the great Indian patriots. He has missed no opportunity to press the claims of India for a generous measure of self-government and, as has been shown, it was his earnest and disinterested advocacy that persuaded Mr. Austen Chamberlain to draft, and later Mr. Montagu to make, the declaration of 1917, which is the corner-stone of Britain's policy towards India to-day. Again when the fate of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms hung in the balance, it was his voice that assured Britain that the princes were whole-heartedly in favour of political



advance in British India. But for the momentous declaration which the Maharaja, with the courage and vision of a patriot, made in 1930 at the first Round Table Conference, the federal scheme might never have materialized. In fact, the Maharaja has been one of the most consistent nationalists, whose influence and prestige have always been on the side of the progressive emancipation of his country. Neither the spasmodic gestures of republicanism in which some British politicians indulge, nor the open hostility of the so-called States' Peoples Conference have been able to divert him from the path of integral nationalism, which his patriotism visualized early as the only method of reconciling the self-respect of his country with the loyalty which he owed to the Crown.

His vision of India from early days has been that of a federation in which the sovereign States of India will be united with the self-governing provinces under the aegis of the British Crown. He saw at first dimly, but with increasing clearness as time passed, that in the greatness of India lay the greatness of her princes and that the recovery of the princes' position was indissolubly connected with increased status for India. While he was prepared to enter the lists against even the most renowned names in British India to safeguard the rights of the princes, as he did in 1929 in his controversy about the Nehru report, in the wider question of Indian claims he never concealed his sympathy with the legitimate aspirations of his countrymen. In his vision of the future India there is room for the great States to develop their individual life according to the traditional polity under which they have prospered as well as for a democratic India. And his supreme conviction is that in the wise reconciliation of these different traditions, India will evolve a system which will enable her to hold her head higher in the comity of nations.

In the wider affairs of the Hindu community also the

Maharaja has played an active and notable part. He was one of the earliest advocates of the Hindu University of Benares, and in the Sanskrit inscription on the foundation-stone his name appears next to that of the venerable Pandit Malaviya, as one of those to whose activities that great centre of learning owes its existence. He presided at the first meeting summoned at Calcutta to enlist popular support for the scheme and he delivered a message of sympathy from Lord Hardinge. He also took a leading part in the conference organized to discuss the problem of the uninterrupted flow of Ganges water at Hardwar, the famous place of Hindu pilgrimage. The question had become one of great public importance as Hindu sentiment was deeply stirred by an interruption in the flow of the water of the sacred river by certain irrigation works erected above the bathing ghats. As an orthodox Hindu with no communal feelings, the Maharaja has been a pillar of strength to his community.

By nature the Maharaja is religious, though his religion is not of the demonstrative variety. No day passes without the ordained worship of God, and he observes with punctilious care the Hindu religious calendar. In earlier years the Maharaja was perhaps less responsive to the appeal of religion, but with advancing age his mind has turned definitely towards the more spiritual aspect of worship. During the last two years, those who have had the privilege of seeing him constantly have noticed this change and the growing hold religious sentiment exercises upon him.

The story that the preceding pages have unfolded is not in the ordinary sense dramatic; it is not enlivened as is usual in the history of kings and rulers of States with resounding victories or humiliating defeats on the fields of battle or in the more subtle atmosphere of international diplomacy and high statecraft. The circumstances of an Indian State to-day do not afford openings for such

careers. But on a different scale and in other fields the Maharaja's life-story is also one of victories and defeats: victories over famine, scarcity, ignorance, and unorganized life, and defeats also at the hands of the same foes. The Maharaja has had a full share of both. Nor is this record one of achievement without its own spot-lights of glory. The Maharaja of Bikaner was selected as the first representative of India at the Imperial War Cabinet, plenipotentiary on behalf of his country at the Conference of Nations at Paris and signatory of the treaty of Versailles, the first Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes; he witnessed the first flow of water in his desert land from the new system of canals, led the Indian delegation to the League of Nations, and last but not the least accepted on behalf of the Ruling Princes of India the offer of a federal union with British India. These are achievements which would have imparted glory to the life of any statesman. With pardonable pride the Maharaja may look back to a life not only of usefulness to his own State and to his motherland, but of distinguished achievement hardly equalled and certainly not surpassed by any Indian prince or commoner of his generation.

If the circumstances of an Indian ruler do not give him or his State any opportunity for distinction in the fields of war or of international diplomacy, it is equally true that of all the rulers in the world to-day the ruler of an Indian State alone can justly claim that what is done in his State is not only done in his name, but by his command and under his direction. The responsibility for success or failure belongs solely to him. The achievements of the Maharaja viewed in this light are his own; and gained against the great natural handicaps under which the ruler of a State has to work. Who then can deny that his life has been one of useful activity, guided by great vision and wisdom.

Though the Maharaja completed the fiftieth year of his reign in August 1937, he is not, even judged by Indian standards, an old man. In his fifty-seventh year, he is at the zenith of his mental powers, mature in his wisdom, mellowed by his experience, and settled in his attitude towards life. A life of even greater usefulness and more notable achievements in the changed circumstances of India and her Princes surely awaits him. And in the new era, which he has laboured so long and so strenuously to usher in, and the faint glimmerings of whose first glory are now visible on the horizon, the experienced guidance and the sturdy patriotism of the Maharaja who has earned his place not only as a doyen among the princes, but as an elder statesman of the British Empire, will be one of India's greatest assets.

## APPRECIATION

*By* SIR WALTER LAWRENCE

MORE than half a century ago I first visited the then desert State of Bikaner. I rode with my chief, Sir Edward Bradford, over the desolate sand-hills. We started in the cold dawn, and travelled over a hundred miles before sunset without fatigue, for we found good and fresh horses every seven or ten miles. It was a pleasure to ride with Sir Edward. He loved horses and he loved the people of Rajputana. We went to all the States of Rajputana save one. I look back to those tours on horseback through Rajasthan, the home of the rajas, as the most delightful of the happy experiences of my life in India. Sir Edward was a fine trainer of youth. He had served through the Mutiny with the Central India Horse, the best nursery for officers of the Political Department of the Government of India—good horsemen, and courteous in manner—qualities which are esteemed in Rajputana.

After our long ride over the billowy sand we found camel carriages awaiting us, and all the long night the camels padded silently through the sand. It was like riding in a hearse with the disadvantage of being alive and awake. And so we came to Bikaner, the capital of the king of the jungle.

There was a mighty fortress, in which the Palace lay. Sand all around, and very little water. Such water as there was was drawn from four deep wells, and they told me that each well was managed by a company, and that there was a regular charge for a cup of water. But the water was of rare quality and was supposed to be the secret of the famous sugar-candy of Bikaner. There were no trees, and no signs of verdure. There was a prickly grass, known as bhraut. They made bread from its seeds,

and a very fierce liquor much appreciated by the Rajputs. The residency house, where Sir Edward and I stayed with the lonely political officer, was small, mean, and forbidding.

After a bath—most of the inhabitants of Bikaner in those days laved in sand—we drove to the Palace alongside of a deep, dry moat, through massive gates with iron spikes, over steep stone ramps and through deep twining alleys to the highest story of the Palace. The four horses seemed to know the road and evidently thought that the quicker they galloped the sooner it would be over. The coachman was a fatalist, and I saw him shrug his shoulders when his near leader was hit by a piece of wad from the saluting battery, posted too close to our route. I had never known such a drive, and I shuddered at the thought of our return journey.

But all misgivings vanished as we entered the audience hall of the Maharaja of Bikaner. It was not large, but it was perfect in design and glorious in colour. It was the richest room I had ever seen, but its richness was soothing and simple: they were masters of lacquer and mosaics still in Bikaner, and these sumptuous walls, very ancient, looked as fresh as work of yesterday. This year, some fifty-four years after my first visit, I stayed again in Bikaner, with the present Ruler of the State, and the glory of that exquisite hall of audience was unchanged, and cast the same spell over me. But all else was changed.

As I sat in this hall, fascinated by the old world courtesy, the dress and the address of the Maharaja and his court, the conversation between his Highness and Sir Edward Bradford was formal, but after the exchange of compliments the real business began and it was a very grim business; I listened with attention, for later I should have to make a note of the conversation. In the pauses I looked out to the high walls and lofty dwelling-rooms of the Palace. On the left was a towering suite of rooms,

where the present Maharaja Ganga Singhji was born. He was too young to be with his elder brother, and to watch his anxious, care-worn face, as he listened to the earnest pleadings of Sir Edward Bradford. Briefly, the barons of the Bikaner State had refused to pay the traditional dues owing to their chief. The harvests had been poor and the barons said they could not and would not pay. Some efforts had been made to bring about a compromise, and with goodwill and tact there seemed hope that a settlement could be arrived at. But tempers were frayed. A Rajput Chief is regarded as *primus inter pares*, but some of these peers, known as thakurs, had vast estates and vast ideas of their own importance, and, though Sir Edward still hoped for a settlement, we left Bikaner with uneasy feelings.

Soon after this visit the barons went out and defied their Ruler, and most reluctantly the Government of India decided to send a brigade to prevent war between the Maharaja and his rebellious barons. It was a strong brigade, but it was a difficult march to Bidasar, as the sand was deep and water was scarce. The guns of the Field Artillery Battery—the last battery to use Persian horses—stuck in the sand and elephants dragged them slowly along. It was very cold at nights. At Bidasar, the fortress of Bahadur Singh, one of the leading rebels, the outlaw barons and their followers were assembled, armed to the teeth. The walls of the town bristled with guns of ancients, and I have never seen such a collection of antiques. But the strength of Bidasar lay in the high sand walls crowned by awkward thorns, and the Brigadier, General Gillespie, told me that it would be a difficult place to take by assault. Sir Edward Bradford thought rather of the desperate bravery of the Rajputs and dreaded that they would have recourse to *johur*, when the Rajputs, after burning their women, sally forth to die fighting. He was anxious and unhappy as the rebels refused to parley.

So it was decided to attack Bidasar. But at midnight I was awakened in my tent by the four chief leaders of the rebels. They surrendered without condition. I rushed to Sir Edward Bradford's tent and told him the good news. Then General Gillespie was told and, after some discussion, it was decided that the fort of Bidasar should be demolished and that the troops were to march back to Nasirabad. The four rebel chiefs were to be banished from the Bikaner State.

The next morning I saw a strange sight; the fort of Bidasar rose intact from the ground, and then crumbled into dust and flames. The sappers and miners had done their work most thoroughly.

And then I left Bikaner for many years.

This may seem a lengthy introduction to my appreciation of the remarkable Maharaja Ganga Singhji, but to all things there is a background. His background when he succeeded his brother was a desert kingdom, without roads or railways, lacking water and all that connotes civilization in the East. Poor and indeed bankrupt in revenue, torn by dissension and discontent, but rich in men and in camels. Few would have prophesied fifty years ago that the youthful Maharaja would live to see his country prosperous and progressive, ranking high among the great States of India.

Though I had left Rajputana for the Punjab my interest in Bikaner never flagged. The man who was appointed tutor to the young Maharaja was an old friend of mine. He found an apt pupil, and the education of the Maharaja Ganga Singhji bears out my careful opinion that Indians should be trained in India and should not be subjected to the risks and disappointments which too often attend an education in England. The young Maharaja was fortunate in his tutor, but Sir Brian Egerton was equally fortunate



in his pupil. Quick, industrious, and observing, he soon assimilated all that the West had to offer, but was learning at the same time all that is best in Indian wisdom and Rajput traditions. The late King held a high opinion of Maharaja Ganga Singhji, and has often said to me that no one in the British Empire could write a better letter. I have been the happy recipient of many of his letters and of most of his important State resolutions. The style is always easy and clear, and there is no wandering from the main point. In India there is a common fault among Indian and British, who want to get things done: they know that they can do it, and they do it themselves, and will not delegate the work to others. The late Maharaja of Gwalior, like his great friend the Maharaja of Bikaner, had this noble fault, but in both cases the result of their unending toil was to make their respective countries prosperous, progressive, and strong. But the task in Bikaner was the harder in that the country was more desert and there was nothing to build on. As I have mentioned, the background was blurred and unpromising.

When I went back to India with Lord Curzon I saw much of the Maharaja. He was then on the full tide of action, fine in presence, courteous in manner, and tremendously in earnest. Lord Curzon at once recognized in him a fellow worker in Empire, possessing the same energy, and the same craving for efficiency which characterized that great Viceroy. In those days some regarded the Indian State as an anachronism, but rulers like those of Gwalior and Bikaner convinced Lord Curzon that they were, in oriental phrase, veritable 'pillars of State'. I was with Lord Curzon when he visited Bikaner. This time it was not a ride over the roadless sands, but a comfortable journey on the well-laid railway of the Bikaner State, and when we reached the capital we were received in the magnificent Palace which the Maharaja had recently built—red sandstone, exquisitely carved, and cool white

marble slabs, standing in a noble garden shaded by trees, and gay with flowers. The Maharaja is an ardent builder, and he has in his State a splendid material to his hand: he had turned his energies to the vital question of water. I went out to see a colliery, not far distant from the capital, where coal was being extracted which brought power and industry to Bikaner. In that same colliery I saw an underground river, which was already being used for the production of vegetables and fruit. Bikaner was indeed transformed. The old Fort stood massive and unchanged, but around it parks and noble buildings showed what one man of energy and vision could create. One such building was opened by Lord Curzon. Like all his halls and colleges, it was grand, and suitable to the great air of that desert oasis. It was a club for the nobles of the State. It was my wont to leave the dais and sit at a distance to hear the speeches and watch their effect on my neighbours. One of the barons courteously made room for me on his bench and asked whether this was my first visit to Bikaner. I told him that I had been there many years before when the present Ruler's brother was Maharaja, and that I had been at Bidasar. I asked what had become of Bahadur Singhji. 'There he is', was the answer, and there at the end of my row sat Bahadur Singhji, now a member of Council, and wearing the mark of high honour, a heavy anklet of gold. And in a moment I was talking to Bahadur Singhji as an old friend, and we never mentioned the blowing up of Bidasar. This little incident, one of many, always makes me think that life in an Indian State (which, if I were an Indian, especially a Rajput, I should prefer to life in British territory) has, amongst many other attractions, the chance of making good. An outlaw one day may become an honoured colleague in Government when a few years have passed. There is always hope in an Indian State that a man who has gone off the rails may get back.

I admired all the magical changes which I saw on Lord Curzon's visit, but I was more impressed by the rehabilitation of Bahadur Singhji than by the material miracles which Maharaja Ganga Singhji had wrought. I noticed everywhere his attention to details. Every arrangement in the Palace and at the glorious Gajner, with its grand lake, the winter home of wild duck, and the resort of the Imperial sand grouse, was thought out to the smallest detail. There is a word in India, 'bandobast'. It means much. It connotes system and discipline, and it is the secret of good administration in India. I have known some masters of bandobast: Amar Singh of Kashmir, the father of the present Maharaja; Madho Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior; and Ganga Singhji, Maharaja of Bikaner. These were all educated in India, and all would rank in any country of the world as great administrators. Lord Curzon, too, was a master of bandobast; and all four revelled in detail. There are transcendentalists who scoff at detail and deny the great qualities of men like Kitchener, also one of the masters of bandobast. They say that such as these cannot see the forest for the trees, but the great men I have named knew each tree in detail but, nevertheless, clearly realized and fully appreciated the forest.

. . . . .

Some years later I again visited Bikaner on the staff of King George, when he as Prince of Wales visited India. I noticed still further signs of steady and wise progress—roads, railway extensions, grand buildings for hospitals and schools, and I saw in desert Bikaner the smoke of factories. The trees in the parks, the excellent roads and the abundance of water made one wonder whether this was the Bikaner which I had first seen over twenty years before. Always the same perfect arrangement, and all in keeping with the *genius loci*. One of the many institutions of Bikaner was the famous Camel Corps which had

fought for the British cause in far-off lands, fine men of a fighting race mounted on thorough-bred camels.

This was thirty years ago, and I thought, as we regretfully left Bikaner and its charming hospitalities, that the Maharaja had exhausted all capacity for further progress. But this year, 1936, I again visited Bikaner, and stayed for nearly a month with the Maharaja in his red sandstone Palace. In the mornings he was working hard in his office, but in the afternoon every day, and at night, we were much together. He took me on his inspections, and out to shooting expeditions at Gajner and the other shooting lodges deeper in the desert, after the bustard and the demoiselle cranes. Everywhere I saw good roads, the steady encouragement of forest, and the most elaborate planning for the retention of the rainfall. Bikaner has a very scanty rainfall, and at times the weather is capricious, and I saw the destruction which had been caused by unusual deluges. Now, the rain-water is cleverly guided into the fine lakes like that of Gajner. I saw much, and learnt much on this long visit to Bikaner. The great achievement since the late King's visit was the Canal Colony to the north of the State. The enriching waters of the Himalayas had turned the desert into a broad belt of splendid agriculture, and this has meant much in the life and economy of Bikaner. From being a comparatively poor State Bikaner now stands high among the great States of India, as high economically as she has always stood politically, alike in Moghul as in British times. The Maharaja shows with pride the gifts of honour made to his ancestors by the Moghul Emperors.

I had seen much of the Maharaja in the years of the Great War, and had been with him at Geneva, where he took a prominent part as representative of India. Later, he was a leading figure in the Round Table Conference on the future constitution of India, always consulted and esteemed for his ripe experience, his clear thinking, and

devoted zeal for the British Empire, and the British connexion with India. I had imagined that the world stage, on which he had taken leading parts, would have dimmed his enthusiasm and energies in the less exciting problems of local administration. But I was wrong, and in our long talks I found that the passage of years, and the vivid experiences of Europe, had in no way impaired his energy and his enthusiasm. There was always something that wanted doing, and the Maharaja, who had already done so much, felt that he was the one man in the State who could carry through the work thoroughly. Sometimes I would venture to suggest that he should have some respite from his unending labour and should delegate more to others and younger men. But his answer, courteous and indeed persuading, always was that the younger men made mistakes, costly and delaying; that life was short and the list of his dreams long.

So when years hence the story of Bikaner is written it will tell of a great and devoted ruler who allowed no distraction of ambition, pleasure, or sport to interfere with his noble effort to turn his desert state into a country of prosperous peace, ever advancing towards his ideal of congenial and compatible civilization.

Like most of us, he has not escaped sorrow and trials, but the great idea of his life has acted as a stimulus and as a refuge from sadness.

Our talk was not always about administration, finance, and material progress, and often we strayed into the other world. He gave me the opportunity of meeting the leader of Hindu religion in Eastern India, the prelate of Sacred Puri. His three compeers reside at Dwarka in the west, Badrinath in the north, and Rameshwar in the south of India. His Holiness of Puri a little while ago had come a long distance, unannounced, to visit a humble disciple in Bikaner, and a chance friendship with the Maharaja began: I had long known of my host's devotion to his

religion, and his respect for the traditions and customs of the Hindus, and in my absorbing conversation with the great sage of Puri, I soon realized that he admired the Maharaja, who, in spite of his English education and his close participation in the distractions and the greatest dangers ever known in the European world, had remained staunch to his religion, and loyal to the spirit of Mother India.

At the shrine of Kolayat, on a pretty lake distant and remote, but much frequented by the Hindu pilgrims from all parts—at this quiet and dreamy refuge from the world I found the same appreciation of the Maharaja, who cared for the shrine and its attendants, and had built a railway through the sterile desert to help the weary pilgrims on their journey.

In this short appreciation of my friend I have no space left to describe his charming personality and his ever-thoughtful consideration. I may not violate his hospitality and confidence by telling the strange experiences of his spiritual life. We had discussed these high and fascinating subjects years ago, and I had become a convinced listener, but had always felt that this was a rare and beautiful world, for which I had not the training or the mental equipment. Nevertheless it allured me, and none of my Indian friends convinced me more than Maharaja Ganga Singhji, that no Hindu who is not wholly true to his religion can be of much help to India. For let us remember that first and last India is the land of the Hindus.

He came down to Bombay and saw me off when I left for England. I fear I shall not see Bikaner again, but as long as I live its Ruler will be in my thoughts. Strong men devoted to one great object in life as Maharaja Ganga Singhji was devoted to the development of his vast State are apt to be wearisome companions, but Ganga Singhji never wearied me. In spite of his power and habit of

concentration, he was versatile in his interests, and of him it may be truthfully said,

‘Nihil quod tetigit non ornavit.’

His buildings, his beautiful gardens at Gajner and at the grand Palace of Lallgarh, ablaze with English flowers, and shaded by the best of Indian trees, showed his unerring taste; as a soldier he has laboured to make his troops serviceable and smart; as a sportsman he excelled, but I always noticed that he thought more of giving sport than of having it. He is indeed a man of great qualities, and to me his most endearing quality is his loyalty to his old friends.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

1. Born *13th October 1880.*
2. Succeeded as Maharaja *31st August 1887.*
3. Marriage *8th July 1897.*
4. Assumed Ruling Powers *16th December 1898.*
5. Gazetted Honorary Major—youngest Major at the time in the British Army *June 1900.*
6. Proceeded on active service to China in command of the Ganga Risala to take part in the Boxer War *August 1900.*
7. Created K.C.I.E., for China War services *July 1901.*
8. Officially attended Coronation of King Edward VII *August 1902.*
9. Appointed an Honorary A.D.C. to the Prince of Wales *August 1902.*
10. Birth of Son and Heir *7th September 1902.*
11. Appointed Honorary A.D.C. to His Majesty King George V *June 1910.*
12. Officially attended Coronation of King George V *June 1911.*
13. LL.D. (Cambridge) *June 1911.*
14. Silver Jubilee of Reign *1912.*
15. Proceeded to Europe to fight in the Great War *September 1914.*
16. Elected Honorary General Secretary to the Princes' Conference *1916.*
17. Promoted Honorary Major-General *July 1917.*
18. Represented Ruling Princes of India at Imperial War Cabinet and Conference *March 1917.*
19. Received Freedom of the Cities of London, Edinburgh, Manchester, and Bristol *1917.*
20. Created K.C.B. (Military Division) for services in the Great War *January 1918.*
21. Member of Imperial War Cabinet and the Peace Conference *1918-1919.*
22. Created G.B.E. (Military Division) for Services in the Great War *January 1921.*



23. Elected First Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes 1921.
24. Represented Ruling Princes of India at Assembly of League of Nations *September* 1924.
25. Opening of Gang Canal *October* 1927.
26. Elected Chancellor of Benares Hindu University 1929.
27. Promoted Honorary Lieut.-General *September* 1930.
28. Attended Assembly of League of Nations as Leader of the Indian Delegation *September* 1930.
29. Represented Ruling Princes of India at Imperial Conference *October* 1930.
30. Attended the 1st and 2nd Indian Round Table Conferences in London 1930-1931.
31. Officially attended Coronation of King George VI *May* 1937.
32. His Highness's Golden Jubilee Celebrated *Autumn* of 1937.

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